Flying Ace Stories

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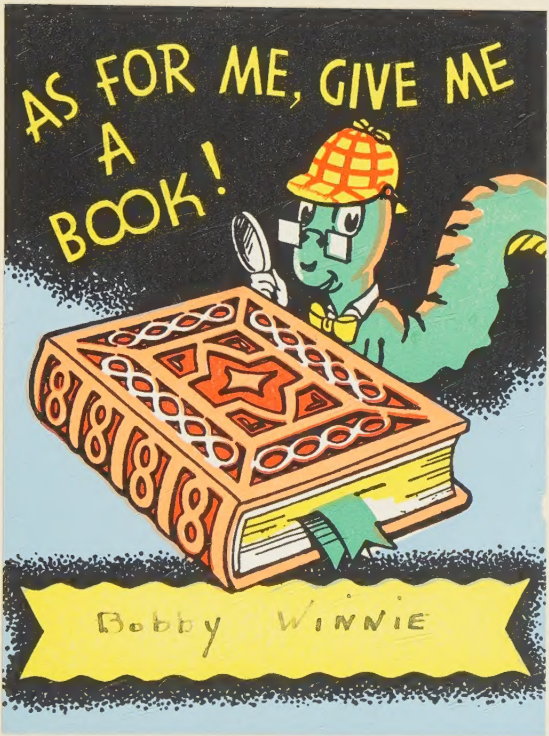
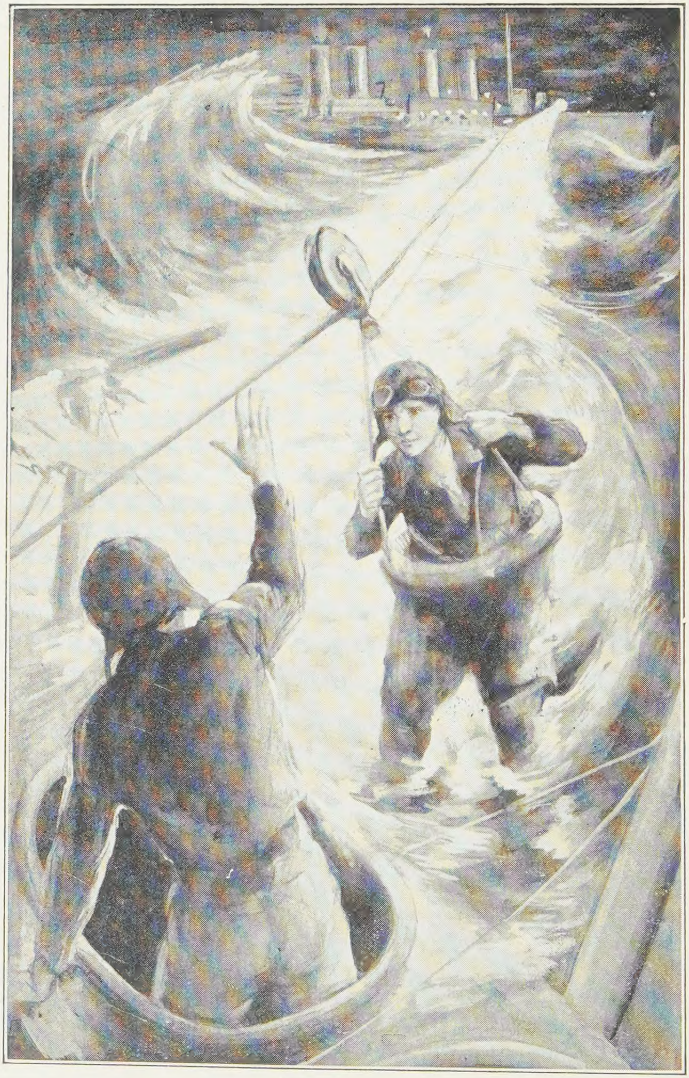

AS FOR ME, GIVE ME A BOOK!
Bobby Winnie



"BILLY FELT HIS UNSTEADY SEAT LEAVE THE PLANE."
"BILLY SMITH EXPLORING ACE." (Page 46)

FLYING ACE STORIES

BY NOEL SAINSBURY, *JR.*

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BILLY SMITH—EXPLORING ACE

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BILLY SMITH— EXPLORING ACE

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BILLY SMITH EXPLORING ACE

Chapter I

THE NAVAL AIR STATION

THE United States Naval Air Station at Hampton Roads is located on the site of the old Jamestown Exposition, some eight or nine miles from Norfolk, Virginia. With its picturesque approach from the water, with the graceful concrete arch looming in the center and its pier hangars well grouped on each side, it presented on a bright March day an interesting picture of activity and color.

The station itself extends for over a mile of water front, embracing within its limits numerous shops and buildings for the construction, repair, launching and operation of every type of naval aircraft. And from its three beaches or concrete runways—one inside the arch, in what is known as the basin; two outside, known as the east pier and west pier—seaplanes are operated.

A boy of fourteen, sandy-haired and freckled, stood on the Basin Beach before the open door of a great metal hangar and watched a Chief Petty Officer and

two naval mechanics idling one of the twin twelve-cylinder motors of a seaplane. The din of the motor was deafening, but neither the sailors nor the boy watching them paid the least attention to it.

An officer in the green uniform of the Naval Air Service, broad gold bars and star on his black shoulder straps denoting his rank of lieutenant-commander, the spread gold wings just above the left-hand pocket of his blouse proclaiming him a flyer, came round a corner of the hangar and catching the boy's eye, beckoned to him.

The lad's face lit up with pleasure as he saw who it was, and leaving the intricacies of the Liberty motor to the tender mercies of the C. P. O. and his assistants, he ran out to the officer. They strolled down the beach to where the concrete took a sudden dip down to the water. The officer had thrown an arm affectionately about the boy's shoulders. These two were evidently great friends.

"Cape Henry telephoned that two planes passed the light about five minutes ago," said the officer, with a glance at his wrist-watch. "We ought to be able to sight them in a minute or two. From the numbers phoned, it must be Number Four patrol."

The boy nodded. He knew that every seaplane in the United States Navy has its number painted in large white letters on the battleship-gray of its hull or its fuselage, depending upon its type. He could also have told you that a seaplane is a hull with wings

and a motor; in other words, a flying boat: that so far as the Navy goes a fuselage is the elongated structure of approximately streamline form, to which are attached the wings and tail unit of an airplane, the motor, etc.

Billy Smith had lived aboard Naval Air Stations long enough to tell at a glance the type of a seaplane, and with as little thought or trouble as the average boy distinguishes different makes and models of automobiles. Just at present his eyes were sweeping the sky. Presently, he pointed with an excited finger toward the horizon on their right.

"There they are, Uncle Jack," he exclaimed. "It must be Burke and White back from their Moorehead City hop."

"How did you guess that, Billy?"

"It wasn't a guess, sir. Even from here I can see that those planes are HS2s. It's too early in the morning for any of to-day's patrols to return yet. I saw Burke and White start off for Moorehead City yesterday in a couple of HS2s—they ought to be returning by now—so I reckon it's them."

"Right, son," said Lieutenant-Commander Smith with a smile. "Keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, Billy, my boy, and, as they used to say in the old Navy, you won't have to swallow sea-water."

A Chief Petty Officer, accompanied by a number of men in dungarees now made their appearance from within one of the hangars. Two of the men wore

waders, or hip-length rubber boots. Still another of the sailors mounted a small tractor attached to a seaplane cradle by means of a heavy hawser. Then the tractor moved off toward the water, lumbering along on its heavy wheels.

A seaplane is only moored on the water in cases of necessity, for with its wide-spread wings it acts exactly like a boat with all sails set, and even a gentle wind may cause it to break its moorings. So to avoid damage, seaplanes, after alighting on the water, are hauled ashore and having no wheels of their own have to be placed aboard a cradle or carrier, in order to be run up the incline of the beach and into the hangar.

This is exactly what the men on the basin beach were getting ready for that morning. The sailor aboard the tractor swung down the incline, but slewed to one side before reaching the water, and having tilted the cradle down the slope, allowed the heavy vehicle to roll beneath the little waves of the land-locked basin, where it came to rest on the concrete beneath the water. Two sailors immediately detached the rope from the tractor, holding it taut and allowing that animated caterpillar to roll back up the incline in search of another cradle—for, as you remember, the returning patrol was comprised of two planes. There was no hurry or bustle about all this. Except for an occasional order from the C. P. O., no one had spoken. Every man knew what was expected

of him. A beach watch aboard a United States Air Station functions smoothly, speedily and with precision.

Those who were watching the incoming patrol saw first one and then the other of the humming seaplanes make a flipper-turn to port and nose sharply down for a cross-wind landing outside the basin where for a minute or two they were lost to sight. But presently, vanguarded by the din of their motors, they appeared, one behind the other, from beneath the arch, and taxied up the basin, leaving wide tracks of curling foam in their wake.

The men in waders now stepped into the water on either side of the submerged cradle, thereby giving the pilot of the first plane his direction. With a precision made perfect from long practice, the airman shut off his motor at just the right distance from the beach, and the big plane, propelled by her own momentum, drifted slowly in and over her submerged cradle. Then while the two beach men in the water held fast to her interplane struts, so as to hold her in position, pilot and assistant pilot (there are no observers in the Navy) sprang ashore and wiping the spray from their eyes, strolled up the incline toward Billy and his uncle.

The hawser attached to the cradle beneath the water became taut as the nose of the plane touched the beach, and one noticed that the tractor after having deposited the second cradle in position had taken hold

of the first one's rope again. Now with no apparent effort it started up the beach, hauling the cradle upon which the seaplane rested, eventually to disappear within the wide doors of a hangar with its charge.

Then the second plane nosed the concrete at the water's edge, and the beach watch went through the same performance all over again.

The aviators came up to where the Smiths, uncle and nephew, were standing, and removing their helmets, pulled the cotton out of their ears and chirruped a greeting. No, they did not salute. A Naval Officer never salutes unless he is in uniform with his cap on. The fliers, of course, were clad in their flying gear, one-piece garments made of thick waterproof stuff, known as monkey-suits. For a minute or two they chatted, then marched off toward their squadron office to report their flight and rid themselves of the heavy flying clothes.

"Do I get my lesson this morning, Uncle Jack?" asked Billy. It was Saturday morning and school in the ordinary sense held no meaning to the lad's question. "It's a peach of a day for a hop—the air ought to be smoother than glass."

"Perhaps," returned his uncle. "But smooth air, young man, is something one never should count on. You heard what Mr. White said about running into that pocket off Hatteras—that he dropped two hundred feet? By the way, Bill, how did he know he dropped two hundred feet?"

"That's easy, sir. His altimeter needle must have swung over a point and he happened to notice it."

"Go to the head of the class," bantered the Commander. "You're beginning to profit by my teaching, Bill. Do you really think you need any more flight instruction?"

"Now you're kidding me again, sir," remarked his nephew. "Please, Uncle Jack—take me up this morning."

"All right, son, run along and get into your flying clothes. And then see Mr. Perkins and ask him to be good enough to have the old boat pulled out. I've got some business to attend to down here, but I'll meet you in twenty minutes, and then we'll shove off."

He strolled away toward the squadron office, while Billy hurried in search of the division commander of the day to give him his uncle's message.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, it might be well to state that a squadron of seaplanes in our Navy is divided into three divisions. The squadron commander, generally a Lieutenant, or two-striper, as Navy parlance has it, a rank similar to that of Captain in the Army, has under him three division commanders, usually Lieutenants—(junior grade) or J. G.'s as they are called: they rank with First Lieutenants in the Army. Under these officers are the patrol pilots of the division, who are usually Ensigns, although now since the war, a small number of war-

rant Officers, Chief Petty Officers and Petty Officers, have received flight training and have become seaplane pilots. The whole of the flying of a large Air Station like Hampton Roads, with its three squadrons of planes, is under the command of a Flight Superintendent, and this was the position held by Billy's uncle, Lieutenant-Commander Smith, aboard the station.

Billy's mother had died five years before this story opens, and as his father, a scientist, interested principally in the study of primitive races, was most of the time engaged in his scientific pursuits in outlandish nooks and corners of the world, away from civilization, the boy had made his home with his navy uncle, his father's only brother and Billy's only other relative. To Billy, his father, seen only at short periods between his expeditions to the unexplored ends of the earth, was not nearly so real a person as Uncle Jack, whom he saw daily, except on rare occasions. Of course, he loved and admired his father who had the pluck to risk his life among savages in lands lying far from the haunts of white men. But it was now over three years since the boy had seen him, and Bill had long ago transferred a great part of his affection to that jolly sailor and flyer, his uncle.

The Commander was a bachelor, so the two shared the sailor's quarters and Billy had come to look upon him as a second father. The life of Naval Air Stations had become the lad's life, and he loved it. Na-

ture had given Billy a sunny disposition, and that happy faculty of making friends easily, and he was as much at home in the men's barracks as in the officers' quarters, in the machine shops as on the beaches. Billy was a good mixer.

Of course he attended school. His uncle believed in public schools, so when they happened to be transferred to another station, Billy simply transferred to another public school, in the town nearest the Air Station. Occasionally Uncle Jack managed to secure a month's leave, at which times the two would disappear from the Air Station and spend their holiday shooting and fishing. The love of the wild, the call of the open spaces, seemed inborn in the Smith family.

Any boy who has red blood in him, and Billy was no Alice-sit-by-the-fire, is bound to become infected by such environment, and for years his one great ambition had been to become a flyer, a qualified aviator. But although he had been "up" numbers of times, it was not until this spring that his uncle had permitted any flight instruction. For the past two years the Commander had mapped out courses in what he called Bill's ground work; for, as he declared to the boy, "No student naval aviator begins his flight training until he has passed his ground school." So the boy, of his own volition, had undertaken a course of study, outside of his regular school work; simple at first, but more difficult as he ad-

vanced, embracing such things as the construction and repair not only of the gas motors which drive the planes but of the seaplanes themselves. He struggled with a simplified form of the theory of flight and aeronautics; of radio, both sending and receiving in the Morse and International codes, and of aerial navigation (for seaplanes maneuver nine-tenths of the time out of sight of land). In fact, he was put through that course of sprouts an efficient Navy has regulated for the beginner.

You mustn't get the idea that Billy spent all his time at such things, or that he didn't spend just as much time at baseball or football as any boy of his age on the station. But he wanted to learn to fly and, until he had completed his ground course, he knew it to be out of the question. He had put his mind to it, and now after two years Uncle Jack had become his instructor in the air. In order to do this, the Commander had bought a plane of his own—for our astute government does not relish having its aircraft used for the instruction of members of an officer's family! And it was in this old HS2, thoroughly overhauled after it became the Commander's property, that Billy was to go up that morning.

He appeared presently from out the squadron locker-room in his monkey-suit, carrying a regulation hard helmet about which the elastic of his goggles was strapped. An HS2 carries no windshield, and no man living can stop his eyes from filling with water

when speeding through the air at sixty or seventy miles an hour. Billy walked impatiently up and down the concrete beach until our old friend the tractor appeared, dragging behind it the seaplane on its cradle.

Then when clear of the hangar, the caterpillar stopped while mechanics tested the motor and the wiring, the twelve-cylinder Liberty motor gently idling the while.

At last Commander Smith, accompanied by the division commander, strolled onto the concrete. Uncle Jack was also in flying clothes, and after a few words to the C. P. O. in charge of the plane, he nodded to Billy. The lad, after placing small pieces of cotton in both of his ears, strapped on his helmet and mounted to his place in the cockpit of the flying boat. In another moment, Uncle Jack was seated beside him. Then, laying one hand on the steering wheel, his uncle raised the other in signal to the C. P. O. The towing rope to the tractor became taut, and slowly they moved down the beach toward the water.

Chapter II

FLIGHT INSTRUCTION

THE big seaplane floated clear of its cradle, Commander Smith slightly widened his throttle, the hum of the propeller increased and they taxied gracefully along the water away from the pier toward the concrete arch at the end of the basin.

Just as it was necessary for Billy to learn many things so that he might fit himself for flight instruction, it is well that the reader, unless he himself be an aviator, be made conversant with a few details in order to more easily appreciate the intricacies of Naval Flying. While Billy and his uncle are getting under way for their hop, we'll explain a few things.

The type of flying boat that these two were about to fly was exactly what its name implies: a boat, or hull with wings. There being but two wings, an upper and lower, it is called a biplane. In the nose or bow of the hull is located a small round cockpit, capable of holding one man. This is termed the fore cockpit, and during the war it housed a machine gun and the bomb releases. About five feet aft of this hole in the deck (for it is little more) the main cockpit is situated, just forward of the wings. In

this are housed the controls, a general term applying to the means provided to enable the pilot to control the speed, direction of flight, altitude, and power of an aircraft. And here pilot and assistant pilot sit side by side. In front of them are double controls, so that when one "takes over" from the other there is no changing of seats. At a comfortable distance forward are two rudder bars, one in front of each pilot, foot bars by means of which the control-cables leading to the rudder are operated. In other words, the pilot steers with his feet much as a boy steers a flexible-flyer in coasting. That is, with one exception. On the sled, if you want to go to the right, you push the bar with your left foot; aboard a seaplane, you push your right foot forward when you want to turn her to the right, for in doing so you pull the rudder to starboard by means of the control-cables attaching the rudder to the rudder-bar.

A movable wooden yoke, upon which two horizontal wheels, much like the steering wheel of an automobile, are attached, rises from the flooring on either side of the cockpit, so as to come well above the seated aviator's knees. The wheels on this yoke are connected by means of the same type of chain that joins the sprocket to the rear wheel of a bicycle. Turn one wheel, you turn both. Now the yoke is arranged to move forward and aft. And as it is connected by cables to the elevators (those movable surfaces usually hinged to the stabilizer and approxi-

mately at right angles to the rudder), you simply push your wheel forward and with it the yoke, and your seaplane when in the air flies downward. Pull back your wheel, and she flies upward.

The wheels themselves are attached by means of wire cables to the ailerons, hinged or pivoted surfaces at the end of each wing. Their function, as they say in the Air Service, is primarily to impress a rolling movement to the airplane; just as the elevator is to impress a pitching movement on the aircraft. You see, in flying an airplane, one not only has to steer it and balance it for the roll to either side, as one does in riding a bicycle, but the plane has to be balanced for the pitch forward and aft as well.

On the dashboard before the pilot and under the overhang of the decking are the altimeter, compass, spirit level, clock, gauges, etc., while at the sides of the cockpit are arranged his motor controls. Just behind his back and above his head, resting on struts between the upper and lower wing sections is the engine, with its propeller. In the hull, abaft the wing sections, are the main gasoline tanks. Their supply is pumped by means of a fan pump up to a gravity tank on the upper wing section directly above the motor which it feeds. Still further aft comes the tail unit of the airplane, comprised of the stabilizer, a normally fixed surface, sometimes called the tail plane. To this are attached the rudder, the elevators, etc.

But now we must get back to Billy and his uncle.

Their tail plane had no more than cleared from beneath the arch, with the basin behind them and the smooth water of Hampton Roads curling to foam beneath their nose, when the Commander gave his engine still more gas and they went speeding along the water at between twenty-five and thirty knots an hour.

The bottom of the hull of a seaplane is so constructed that a wide step makes its appearance just below the nose, gradually tapering away abaft the wing sections. As he speeded up the plane preparatory to the take-off, the Commander pulled his wheel sharply toward him, thereby jerking the two thousand-odd pounds of flying boat onto its step. Now, instead of taxying through the water they went skimming along, the lower extremity of their step barely resting on the surface.

Once more her skipper "gave her the gun," and this time, full strength. Their speed increased visibly; the roaring drone of the motor and its spinning propeller would long ago have deafened the two in the cockpit had it not been for the cotton in their ears. Then, as gently as a rising gull, though far more gracefully, this ton of wood and metal left the water and, like a thing alive, soared upward into its natural element, the air.

As they rose higher, Commander Smith banked to starboard (that is, by turning his wheel he inclined

the airplane laterally so that his left wing lifted and his right wing sank down) and pointed her nose down the Chesapeake. When one turns a corner in the air one does not slow down as in an automobile, one banks; otherwise one skids just as one would do in a motor car. When driving a heavy seaplane this is dangerous, for as the plane skids, she loses her flying speed forward, drops into a spin, and unless you have plenty of air below, it shortly becomes a case of "home papers please copy."

Billy, who was seated on the port side, could see Old Point Comfort and Fortress Monroe below them across The Roads, while a little ahead on their right Willoughby Spit poked a long and crooked nose into the water. It came to the lad that they were just above that section of Hampton Roads where the *Monitor* fought and licked the *Merrimac*, back in the Civil War. Then bringing his glance within the cockpit he saw that his uncle had produced a pencil, and holding a flapping piece of paper on his wheel, was scribbling a note. With a twelve-cylinder engine roaring just above your head, writing or the making of signs is the only means of communication.

At last the Commander passed over the completed note and Billy read:

"Take over the controls, shut off your motor and land with the wind. Then take off—run her up to 2500—spiral down and land cross-wind. More instructions later."

Billy nodded, tucked the note away in his monkey-suit and placed his hands on the wheel before him. At the same time he moved his feet forward and onto the rudder bar. His face below the goggles took on a set look. The very soul of the lad was concentrated upon the job ahead of him. He knew that the landing of a seaplane is a hazardous feat and difficult—one of the most difficult in the whole régime of naval flying, and Bill had never landed a plane before.

In order to land a seaplane on the water (they are only landed once on dry land, by the way), the pilot exactly reverses the operations in the take-off. As the heavy boat comes sweeping down toward the water at a rate of speed close to the hundred-miles-an-hour mark (for remember a plane boasts no brake with which to check her) the pilot must "level off" at just the proper distance above the water, allowing his tail to drop slightly, so as to land on the step. If he "levels off" too late, he noses into the water, crashes and sinks the plane. This is called porpoising. The terrific force of impact usually stuns him, so that nine cases out of ten both pilots are drowned before they come to.

Should the pilot, on the other hand, level off too soon, that is, too far above the water, he causes the airplane to stall and smash down upon the water, crashing his craft. In types where the engine is located above one's head as in the HS2 Billy was flying,

it has an unpleasant habit of dropping down on one and with a result much as if a steam roller had just passed. This is called "pancaking," presumably because the airbus flops down like a pancake into a pan. Wise men avoid pancaking as they would the plague. Those who practice it are lucky if they live to tell the tale. And the trouble with the beastly thing is that it's so easy to do—so hard to avoid.

It is not to be wondered at that, with the knowledge of what a mistake would bring forth, Billy's jaw muscles grew rigid and deep lines appeared at the corners of his mouth. That his uncle was beside him made matters all the worse. It would all come in an instant. The Commander would have no chance to give him the right moment wherein to level off. It was up to him, and to him alone now.

That Billy was nervous doesn't mean that he was in the least a coward. A fellow must be devoid of all imagination whatsoever, not to feel a tightening of his throat, a sensation of emptiness in the region of his stomach, when he is about to make his first seaplane landing, and especially in a type of craft as big and heavy as an HS2. If Bill crashed he would probably kill his uncle as well as himself, and the responsibility added nothing to his enjoyment. But where a coward funks the ordeal, the plucky one, although he weighs the fear, goes ahead and does what he knows he should do in spite of it.

With an easy pressure of his left foot on the rud-

der bar, and a bank to port, Billy brought the plane before the wind. Then with a quick smile at his uncle who watched him with folded arms, he shut off his motor, and pushing his wheel forward, nosed her over and down the steep incline toward the water a couple of thousand feet below. It gave Bill much the same sensation as when the summer before he had ridden in a roller-coaster at Coney Island, only more so; for in this case he was going four or five times as fast. Instead of having a nice little car to cling to, he was driving a seaplane heavier than the heaviest motor truck, and quite as unwieldy, down a steep airtrack that lacked both rails or roadbed, heading for the worst kind of a smash-up at the bottom unless he kept his head and did not make errors in judgment. If you, in your comfortable chair with the solid ground beneath your feet, smile because Billy felt nervous, try it yourself and see. The writer has and he knows.

As things turned out, Billy's uncle's confidence in him was justified. The Chesapeake came rushing up to meet them; and, carefully judging his distance, Bill leveled off, landing her well on her tail but not so that he missed the step. True, the old plane bounced a bit, but it was a landing no aviator need be ashamed of, much less a beginner.

The Commander, who was smiling, clapped his nephew on the back and handed him another note.

"Fine work. Cæsar crossed the Rubicon but once,

thereafter he recrossed it. It's always the first landing that's the hardest. Now try it again and see how much easier it is."

This time Billy took off, and after rising to a height of twenty-five hundred feet, nosed the plane over again for a cross-wind landing. As the big plane shot downward, he found that his uncle's words had been true ones. All nervousness had left him, and with the confidence born of having already accomplished a difficult undertaking, he made a better landing than he had before.

Then after allowing Bill to take off and land for the next half hour, Commander Smith drew forth a large scale map of the air station's patrol area upon which a zigzag course in red had been drawn. This ran from Cape Henry at the mouth of the Chesapeake to an imaginary point on the Atlantic about ninety miles offshore. Passing it over and taking the controls himself, he motioned the lad to navigate the craft.

Inasmuch as naval aircraft are operated a greater part of the time out of sight of land, aerial navigation has become a necessity. Roughly, the navigating of a seaplane is accomplished in this manner.

Air speed, that is the speed of any aircraft relative to the air, is constant. Which means, that if the maximum speed of your plane is one hundred miles an hour, at maximum speed that aircraft must always travel through the air at one hundred miles

per hour. If, let us say, you have a thirty mile wind dead astern, you will be flying over land or water, as the case may be, at thirty plus one hundred, or one hundred and thirty miles per hour. This is called your ground speed. But just the same you will only be going through the air at one hundred miles per hour. And inversely, if you are running into a thirty mile wind, your ground speed will be seventy miles; your air speed being always the same, one hundred. It is on this principle that seaplanes are navigated. Each leg of a flight must of course be figured separately.

First, the navigator looks over the side and down at the waves and from them gauges the velocity of his wind. This takes long practice in order to become accurate. Consequently, the inexperienced frequently find themselves miles off the proper course at the termination of the hop. The direction of the wind the navigator gets from his compass. Then by means of a rose compass and a bit of figuring, he determines what their ground speed will be on the next leg of the hop. In other words, he determines exactly how much the present wind will accelerate or retard their air speed.

Let us say the two are now traveling due east. On the chart the next leg is plotted southeast for twenty nautical miles. Bill learned their ground speed on a southeasterly course with the given wind on the last leg. Therefore, it is a simple matter for him to fig-

ure how long it will take the plane to cover the next twenty miles on the southeast leg. He simply jots down the new compass course and the number of minutes they are to continue to fly along it, when the leg they are on is completed, and passes the paper over to his pilot.

As you may well imagine, it kept Billy busy figuring the different legs of the zigzag course his uncle had plotted. Eventually, as they reached a point about eighty-five miles off the coast, the motor commenced to skip. Although it was darkening ominously in the northeast, the sea was fairly smooth, and Commander Smith made a good landing. Not an easy thing to do, for even in a dead calm the Atlantic has a nine foot ground swell, and Billy had figured the wind at eighteen knots just before they came down.

It needed no reminder from his uncle for Billy to "go over the top." That is, he climbed over the deck and into the fore cockpit before they touched the water, in order to throw their sea anchor overboard. This kept the plane moored head into the wind. Had he not done so the plane would have smashed her wing sections and shortly would have capsized in the trough of the waves.

"Carburetor trouble, I reckon," declared the Commander, once he had his helmet off and the cotton out of his ears. "What's the thing to do, Bill, my lad?"

"It looks like a loose manifold or gas connections,"

replied that young man, "and in that case, the book says 'tighten.' "

But before Bill could start to climb out of the cockpit he was taken with a sudden seizure, and with a hurried leap to the side he gave up his breakfast to the ocean. When limp, but better, he looked around, his uncle was engaged in the same performance across the cockpit. That deceptive ground swell plus gasoline fumes never fails to get even the hardiest mariner. Every naval aviator knows that to come down at sea means that everything else comes up.

Presently, relieved and empty, uncle and nephew set about to rectify their engine trouble. But when after tightening the manifold and going over the gas connections, they tried to start the motor, she refused to mote. This might mean a number of things. First they tested the spark plugs, but with negative results. Switching to the magneto, they had just found an oil-soaked winding, which Billy, under the Commander's guidance, was replacing, when without warning, the approaching storm was upon them. Several big drops of rain fell, and then as if the heavens had suddenly opened, it fairly streamed down upon the luckless aviators. Whipped by the fury of the gale, the rain stung their hands and faces like the cut of a whalebone lash.

Five minutes earlier, they had been calmly floating on a quiet ocean, gently rising and falling to the pitching motion of the ground swell. Now the plane

strained at her mooring with all the terror of a maddened animal. The sea, although flattened by the first force of the wind, was getting up fast and, where the oily swell had glided peacefully by, from out the darkening murk came combers, whitecapped and ominous. It was as though a giant hand had wiped out the sun and night in her rage had flung her wet black mantle over the sea.

For another five or ten minutes, the two in the plane worked frantically at the stubborn motor, but without success. Then the Commander motioned Billy back to the cockpit.

"It's no use," he shouted, using his hands as a megaphone, for the noise of the wind was terrific. "Even if we could turn the motor over, it would be impossible to take off in this sea. She is shipping water in the fore cockpit. Go forward and batten down her tarpaulin cover while I make things shipshape here. Thanks to our sea-anchor and a bit of luck, we'll ride it out yet."

It seemed to the boy as he started toward the nose of the aircraft that each oncoming wave would topple over and swamp the seaplane. And each minute the waves seemed to grow higher; but, head on, the gallant little ship rose to meet them; and with the buoyancy of a duck she would swing up the incline and sweep down into the deep valley beyond.

Bill had gained the fore cockpit and was groping for the bucket he knew was stowed there, in order to

rid the ship of some of the water that washed in with every sea, when he heard a sharp report. Straightening himself, he saw their head play off before the wind, and it needed no second glance to tell him that the mooring had parted. It was as though an unseen force had clutched the plane's nose and was swinging her broadside on to the waves. Billy shuddered, and it is not to his discredit that he did. No seaplane ever built could live more than a minute or two in such a position on such a sea, he knew; and the nearest land was eighty-five miles away.

Chapter III

DOWN AT SEA

AS the seaplane's nose swung off with the wind, Bill's general training stood him in good stead. If there is one thing above all others that air work aboard seaplanes teaches, it is to use one's head and to think—fast. Broadside to the waves, if the next curling, spume-capped comber didn't sink them, the following would, he knew. In the space of half a second at most, Bill's mind worked something like this: "Our sea-anchor is gone; without one we'll go under. What can I use in its place?"

In his hand was the rope attached to the tin bucket he had intended to bale out the cockpit with. Like a flash came the idea—the bucket. With feverish haste, he made fast the end of the rope to a near-by cleat and cast the bucket overboard. It sank immediately, the short rope became taut, and as the oncoming wave overtook them the big plane swung slowly into the teeth of the wind again, but not before the curl of the white-capped wave half deluged the craft, and Billy found himself clinging to the side of the cockpit caught in the rush of gray-green sea water.

As they went sliding down the far side of the

comber, he looked aft and saw with surprise that the lower wing section to port had disappeared and that the upper wing on that side was sagging and broken. Then his uncle, shedding water as he came, jumped into the fore cockpit beside him carrying a wire cable.

Billy felt an affectionate pat on his shoulder which conveyed the Commander's praise plainer than any words. Just at that time Commander Smith was too busy to do more than issue orders.

"Go aft and start the pump going," he said, his mouth close to Bill's ear, for the howl of the wind was terrific. "The bucket idea was good stuff, but that Manila rope won't hold—it's too short, anyway. Her nose is being pulled under and we are shipping quite enough water as it is. Beat it now—I'll look after this."

Bill hurried aft to find that the water in the main cockpit was well up to his knees. But he also found that his uncle had already set up the pump, so he started at the back-breaking exercise with a will. In a few minutes, the boy had the satisfaction of seeing that the water was beginning to ebb; and, after his uncle had lengthened the mooring cable and made fast the cover of the fore cockpit, the plane not only shipped less water but rode much easier on her improvised sea-anchor.

Having made things shipshape forward, the Commander came aft and took a spell at the hand pump, while Billy rested.

"Rotten luck, losing that lower wing section," declared the older man, between strokes. "It's causing her to list badly. The wind must be blowing fifty and, what's more, it is increasing in strength by the minute. If by the time I finish this pumping it shows no sign of letting down, you and I, my lad, will have to get busy and remove what's left of both wings. But first the motor will have to go. The old bus will soon pound herself open at this rate and that will lighten her eight hundred pounds. But it's a tough job, short-handed as we are."

Bill said nothing. He was saving his wind for another turn at the pump. He knew his uncle was empty and weak. But when he started to reach for the handle again, the Commander motioned him back.

"Thanks just the same, old man," he smiled, "but although I admit to having been just as sick as you were a little while back, I'm still the bigger and the stronger—and unless I'm much mistaken, you'll need every ounce of your strength before long."

Presently his uncle stopped pumping and, straightening his back, gave a sigh of relief. But his face, as he steadied himself with a hand on the wheel and gazed at the angry waves doing their best to engulf the frail craft, took on a grim look.

"The wind doesn't seem to be letting up any," said Billy.

"On the contrary," declared the older Smith.

"It's increased since we started the pump. There's nothing for it, but to lighten her. Just take things easy and do as I say; for, remember, if that eight hundred pounds of motor gets away from us, it will go right through the hull of the plane. So be careful. Now let's get busy before we have to man the pump again."

That was a difficult undertaking, the removal of an eight-hundred-pound, twelve-cylinder Liberty motor, by one man and a boy of fourteen. But eventually, after infinite care and patience and, by the help of a small derrick improvised by the Commander from inter-wing struts and control cables, the heavy weight was lowered successfully to the pitching deck. From there it became a comparatively simple matter to push the engine over the side. Billy and his uncle gave sighs of relief when after a last, mighty heave, the Liberty splashed into the water and disappeared into its angry depths.

Although this work seems simple enough in the telling, it had taken them the best part of three hours to accomplish it. The time had been broken into by intermittent tricks at the suction pump; and, although now that they were rid of the weight of their motor, the plane undoubtedly rode easier, there was still a decided list. Both Bill and his uncle were worn out; but no sooner had the sea swallowed up the efforts of their last labor than the two started to rid the hull of both the upper and lower wing sections.

It was not a pretty job when completed, for ax and saw had been used without discrimination. But, when the lightening and trimming of a craft mean the one and only chance of life, speed makes for efficiency.

At last it was finished and all that remained of the graceful HS2 which had skimmed like a gull on the wind down the Chesapeake and out past Cape Henry that morning, were the hull, tail plane, elevator and rudder. A dilapidated but trim little craft at that, and bravely she followed her sea-anchor up the steep incline of the vicious, curling waves and down into the dark valleys beyond. But now instead of straining on her mooring like a water-logged canal boat, her head answered each slight tug with all the swiftness and buoyancy of a canoe. Also, now that she rested higher on the water, less of the broad Atlantic came washing over the decking and into the main cockpit.

Billy sat down on the heaving deck and looked at his wrist-watch. He was surprised to see that the luminous hands pointed to five minutes past one. He had thought it much later. Early afternoon, and yet for hours they had had no glimpse of the sun. For all the light that broke through the heavy cloud-bank extending to the rim of their narrow horizon, it might have been midnight. Uncle Jack, who had been making an investigation aft, came back, and clapped Bill on the shoulder.

"There is nothing we can do now, except set

watches, and wait for district forces afloat to pick us up," he remarked encouragingly. "Make yourself as comfortable as you can on the seats in the cockpit, Bill, and go to sleep for a few hours. I'll call you at five, and then you can take the next watch while I get some rest."

Billy nodded, and made himself a bed by the simple expedient of lying down on the double seats with his crooked arm by way of a pillow and a rubber tarpaulin for a blanket. He had started to doze, when the next lurch of the little ship sent him sprawling. Picking himself up from beneath the controls, bruised and angry, he heard his uncle chuckle, and a voice cut through the howl of the wind above his head.

"When a bunk is narrow and there's a sea on, the wise man lashes himself in," suggested the Commander. "You'll find a line below the forward decking. Cut off a couple of lengths. Make loops of them, first passing the lines round the slats on the back of the seats. Place them so one will pass about your shoulders and the other about your waist, when you slip into them. Then, unless you happen to pull the back of the seats out, you will be able to stay abed."

Billy disappeared beneath the decking to reappear almost at once with a length of line.

"What do you think the chances are of getting picked up, Uncle Jack?" he asked, as he set about making the loops.

The Commander, who had lit a pipe and was seated on the deck just abaft the cockpit, puffing contentedly, shook his head.

"Not so good just as present," he remarked. "No plane ever built could fly in a wind like this. It's blowing easily sixty miles an hour. But, of course, long before this the air station has got in touch with district forces afloat and you can be sure they've sent out destroyers to look for us. But it's a big ocean, Billy, and with our drift which is offshore, we must be pretty nearly a hundred miles out. Even if the destroyers knew where we are, and were steaming directly for us, it wouldn't be possible for them to reach our position by this time. I'll start sending up Very lights about three o'clock and we'll continue to do so every hour. Turn in now, while you can. If the old boat's seams loosen up with the battering she is getting, it will keep us busy at the pump later. Pleasant dreams!"

Billy slipped into the loops and laid himself down on his improvised bed once more. Above him the wind shrieked and howled, and the rain beat down on his half-shielded face. But the looped rope about his waist and under his armpits held him fast and, as he was very tired, he soon sank into the pleasant oblivion of slumber.

It seemed to him that he had hardly closed his eyes, when he felt his shoulder shaken, and his uncle's voice in his ear made him aware that it was five

o'clock. Sitting up, he looked about him. Apparently nothing had changed, except that the rain had stopped. The waves, due to the terrific force of the wind, towered even higher above them.

"Here's the Very pistol," said his uncle, handing that instrument over to Billy. "Send up three lights now and continue to do so every hour until nine, at which time call me. Also don't forget to make half-hour inspections for leaks. You'll find the flashlight in the forward locker. There are biscuits, bar-chocolate and drinking water in that locker, too. You'd better eat something—but go easy on the chow, lad. It may have to do us for some time. Don't forget to call me at nine. After that, we'll take two-hour watches."

The Commander slipped into the cockpit and, curling himself up on his uncomfortable bed with the loops around his long body, soon fell fast asleep with his back to the biting wind.

Billy set to work immediately. He fired three Very shells from the pistol, small star-like shells, which soared up and into the dark night like the lights of a giant Roman candle. Then for a moment or two he searched the horizon for an answering gleam. But the night remained just as black as before, so he clambered forward.

Searchlight in hand, he made a careful inspection of the interior of the hull. After taking a thirst-quenching drink of the luke-warm water in the

locker, the boy secured a bar of chocolate and a few crackers, and took up his vigil on deck.

For a while he sat there and munched his meal, his body giving to the pitch and toss of the little craft. All about him mountainous waves, whipped to fury by the lash of the gale, reached out in their endless endeavor to crush and swamp the plane. And time after time as the lad sat watching the foam-capped combers rise out of the darkness ahead, he wondered that the plane could live through the curling rush over the on-coming water. But each time the little craft wriggled up the hillside and, weathering the swirl at the peak, slid gallantly down the other side.

At eight-thirty, while making his round of inspection, Billy noticed that water was commencing to creep in between the seams on the starboard side of the fore cockpit. Realizing that this was a contingency too serious to be handled alone, he immediately awakened the Commander.

"It's no more than I had been expecting," said that gentleman, sitting up and yawning. "The old boat has had to take a tremendous lot of battering. Pass over the flashlight, Bill, and we'll take a look at the damage."

A five-minute inspection proved that Billy's worst fears had been realized.

"I'm afraid there is nothing much we can do to stop that leak," declared his uncle. "The only lucky thing about it is that she has sprung forward of the

bulkhead. It's a case of getting busy with the pump in the fore cockpit here. If we try to stop up the seam, we'll probably do no more than widen it."

Taking three-minute shifts at the pump, the boy and the man sought to stem the incoming flow of black sea water bubbling up through the slowly widening crack. But pump as fast as they might, both soon realized it was but a question of time, and not many minutes at that, before the fore cockpit would be flooded with the decking. As the Commander remarked in one of his breathing spells, "A small hand pump is a no-account gadget when you're up against the whole Atlantic."

Presently they gave up the job as a waste of energy. After making sure with their flashlight that no water was leaking through the fore bulkhead into the body of the plane, they scrambled back to the main cockpit. But now their game little ship no longer moved buoyantly up to meet each on-coming comber. The weight of the water forward held her down and she moved sluggishly at her mooring. The pump had been removed aft, and one or the other kept the handle going continuously. Although as yet no leak in that part of the plane had appeared, the spray and wash of the waves made the labor absolutely necessary.

Commander Smith talked cheerfully, between spells at the pump, but Billy knew quite as well as he that it was probably only a question of minutes

before a wave larger than its fellows would wash right over them and when it had passed not even a swirl on the angry water would mark the place where they had gone down. It wasn't a pleasant thought, and the boy did his best to keep it out of his head.

Bill, who had been using the last of his spent energy on the pump (for he was very tired) looked up as his uncle, who had been using the Very pistol, took his seat on the cockpit's rim and motioned him to stop.

"It's no use, my boy," he said kindly. "Even if a destroyer did come our way now those aboard couldn't locate us. We're out of luck, I reckon. That was the last of the Veries lights."

Chapter IV

THE RESCUE AND ITS OUTCOME

THE older man slipped from his seat on the cockpit's rim, and threw an arm about Billy's shoulders. The boy turned toward him.

"There's no use crying over broken eggs," the Commander said abruptly. "I'm sorry I got you into this, my lad, but now that we haven't much time left, I want you to know, Bill, that I love you like a son. It makes the going easier to see the pluck you've shown in a tight fix."

Bill said nothing. A choking sensation had crept up in his throat and a great aching tenderness for his uncle came over him.

For several minutes they stood there together, swaying with the pitch and roll of their sinking craft. Then of a sudden Bill felt his uncle stiffen. Commander Smith gave a hoarse shout and swung him round. The next moment Bill's eyes were blinded with the bright glare of a searchlight focused full upon them. Not more than three hundred yards off their port quarter lay the black bulk of a destroyer, her stacks belching smoke. They afterward learned that for the previous fifteen minutes the ship's light had been out of order, thus preventing them sighting it sooner.

In a sea such as was then running, it was impossible of course for the destroyer to come alongside the water-logged seaplane. She maneuvered as close as her skipper thought expedient, then came the sharp report of a gun and a long curve of rope fell over their deck. This Billy and his uncle at once caught and commenced to haul upon. Presently over the side appeared a larger hempen cable. After the two in the plane had made this fast, they felt it grow taut, and a breeches-buoy came swinging down the wind.

Billy did not remonstrate when Commander Smith bade him take his seat in it, for he knew it was the older man's right to leave his craft last. So after a quick handshake and Godspeed, the elder Smith waved his arm and Billy felt his unsteady seat leave the plane and swing outward.

Luckily the Commander had lashed him fast, for the lad was immediately deluged in a mountain of black sea water, and his hands lost their grip on the rope. He felt himself dragged along, spinning and twisting, his lungs bursting, his one conscious thought being that he would probably drown before he reached the destroyer. Then he passed through that wave and swung out into the spume-filled air once more, choking and gasping. Below in the sea valley he could see his own shadow and that of the rope trolley he was traveling, outlined in the glare of the naval craft's searchlight; and again he was immersed

in a foam-topped comber, fighting and struggling for breath.

Just as Bill was beginning to lose consciousness came the blessed air; he heard a shout, and hands reached out and caught him. Then dimly he realized that his lashing had been loosened, that he was being lifted from his swinging seat, that his feet had been placed on the heaving deck of the destroyer. Friendly faces looked into his, friendly hands held him upright; then so far as Billy was concerned, all lights went out, and he remembered no more.

When he awoke, Billy found himself tucked snugly between warm blankets, and realized that he was in the Commanding Officer's cabin and lying in that gentleman's bunk. Standing beside him, looking none the worse for his trying ordeal of the past few hours, and clad in an extra suit of the Commanding Officer's "blues," stood his uncle.

"Glad to see you awake at last, my boy," he said pleasantly, balancing his long body to the violent pitching of the ship. "Drink this and go to sleep again. We are just off Cape Charles. It will be some hours before we make the air station. Commander Wilkins is going ashore when I do, and has offered you his cabin for the night. Now finish your soup like a good fellow, and by morning you'll feel ready for another hop."

Billy swallowed great mouthfuls of the broth

which the Commander held to his lips. He had not thought it possible he could be so hungry. His whole body felt stiff, and he ached in every limb, but now a soothing drowsiness crept up his spine. When the last drop was drained, Commander Smith removed the bowl from his nephew's lips, and was surprised to see that his eyelids had closed, and the worn-out boy was dropping off to sleep again.

In the morning, Billy awoke a trifle stiff, but really none the worse for his experience of the day before. After saying good-by to the destroyer's officers and crew and thanking them for his rescue, he refused their offer of breakfast on the plea that his uncle was expecting him, and went ashore.

As he entered the Commander's quarters, the mess steward was pouring steaming coffee into the elder Smith's cup, and Billy dropped into a seat across the white cloth with an appetite sharpened to a razor's edge by the fragrant beverage.

"Hungry, Bill?" asked his uncle with a smile, as that young man started in on a huge bowl of oatmeal and milk. "I had thought that all you could probably eat would be a little dry toast and weak tea, but it seems just as well I didn't order it."

"You love to kid a feller," was all Billy could find time to answer between mouthfuls. But the bottom of the bowl appearing at that moment under his spoon, he thought better of it and laid that useful article down with a sigh. "I'm feeling tip-top, sir," he

went on, as the servant replaced the empty bowl with bacon and eggs. "That was some experience, though, wasn't it?"

His uncle smiled. "It was all that," he affirmed. "Would you like to try it again to-day?"

"Well, not exactly," grinned his nephew, "but it sure gave me a kick while it lasted."

Commander Smith refilled his nephew's coffee cup.

"So you liked it, did you?" he said. "Well, Bill, you were a good pal aboard that little craft. I knew you had it in you, and to prove my words I'm going to have a talk with you after breakfast about something I think will give you even more kick than our hours down at sea yesterday. No questions now, young man. We'll discuss it in the study later. But just to whet your curiosity and make it harder, as they used to say in the old riddle books, I might hint that there are both airplanes and savages in prospect. —No comments now, if you please. One thing at a time, and it's chow-time now."

When the meal was over, the Commander led the way into his study. He took a seat in a deep armchair and, motioning Billy to another opposite, drew out a pipe which he began to fill as he talked.

"Bill," he commenced, "for some time past I have been considering taking a year's leave; in fact, I have applied for it. This morning I received a letter from Washington granting my request." He held up his hand, as his nephew was about to interrupt. "You

were about to ask why I want so long a furlough, and where I expect to spend it.—That is just what I brought you in here for.

"It is now eighteen months since any word has been heard of your father. Six months before that, he left Port Moresby, the capital of British New Guinea, and went westward along the coast in a canoe or native boat with a few native servants. All this of course you know, and that our last word was from a place called Kaimari, a native village up near the head of the Gulf of Papua. There I believe he turned inland. Since then, although I told you I felt convinced that he would turn up all right, as he invariably has on these exploring expeditions of his, I have been very much worried. I got some books on the Island Continent of Papua or New Guinea, as it is now more often called and, as I read, I learned some astonishing things. Although white men first discovered this huge island over four hundred years ago, except near a few small places like Port Moresby along the coast, few white men have been even a dozen miles inland, and then only by boat up one or another of its rivers. This is due both to the denseness of the jungle swamps near the coast, with their fevers so deadly to the white man, and to the intractability of the majority of the natives. These are ferocious savages, cannibals and headhunters who are with difficulty kept in check by the government peo-

ple along the coast and who run wild at their own sweet will in the back-blocks beyond.

"Some time ago I wrote to the British or, rather, to the Australian, government authorities at Port Moresby. The Commonwealth of Australia has taken over the administration of New Guinea since the war. I asked for information of your father and they forwarded my letter on to the Resident Magistrate of the Western Division, in whose territory the Smith Expedition had last been heard of. This gentleman, whose name is Wells, wrote me a letter which I am going to read to you. Listen to what he says."

The Commander pulled open the top drawer of his table-desk, and taking out a long official-looking envelope, drew forth the letter it contained. Then leaning back in his chair he commenced to read.

"My dear Lieutenant-Commander Smith," the letter ran.

"Your letter of the sixteenth ult. has been forwarded to me from the Lieutenant-Governor's office at Port Moresby. You will see that this letter is written from Daru, a small island lying opposite the mouth of the Oriomo River and the headquarters of the Western Division.

"Shortly after leaving Kaimari, where you tell me you last heard from your brother, Mr. Henry Smith, that gentleman came over here. It was from this place that he started on his expedition to study the

natives of the Fly River district. I might say that I did all I could to dissuade him from this undertaking, and in order to have you understand fully my reasons for doing so, it is necessary to give you some idea of this great river and its estuary.

"Roughly, the Fly is about forty miles wide at its estuary, and even sixty miles up the river, it is miles across. In this great mouth there lie a series of ever-changing islands split into two distinct portions by the great mass of Kiwai, and again on the western side by the large island of Mibu. Mibu must have originally been a small sandbank, for almost in its center is a patch of sand some sixty acres in extent. Round this sandbank mud and mangrove collected until the whole island attained its present size. It is thickly planted with cocoanuts, even in the mud, and the Sumai people once owned large gardens there. Practically all the islands have been formed in the same way, and almost daily you can see them in the making or being washed away.

"There is nothing beautiful or attractive about the lower reaches of the Fly. Nipa and mangrove are the prominent features, with mud thrown in, and of what tourists call 'scenery' there is little to mention. A trip in a sailing vessel is depressing enough. Unless the wind is fair, you simply have to depend on tides—the river is tidal for probably a couple of hundred miles—and it is quite impossible to make headway against them. All navigation is by the lead, for

the water is too muddy to notice any shallows. The southeast trade wind raises very heavy seas, although I have heard many skeptical remarks about getting bad weather inside a 'river'; but when the wind and tide are running against each other and it happens to be blowing hard, I have had as bad weather on the Fly as I ever wish to meet in a small craft.

"On the lower western bank are but three villages of any size, each of the single Long House type, all peaceful and none particularly interesting. All the inhabitants are black and ringleted, and perhaps less afflicted with civilization than their neighbors opposite at Kiwai. In the bush are many small packs of natives, mostly nomads. Now and again they send out messages to you that they are not afraid of the 'police.' 'Come in and fight; your guns are only sticks made to frighten us,' is the burden of their cry; and when you have tramped for hours through some beastly swamp you find perhaps a couple of shelters like dog kennels, whose owners have fled in abject terror long before your approach. As a matter of fact, the river folk are intensely afraid of the sorcery of the bushmen, and invariably describe them as 'big' fighting men.

"Further up the western side is the village of Tirio, which at one time had the distinction of having the largest house and most powerful sorcerers on the lower Fly. Infinite trouble has been caused by Tirio sorcery. Sumai, a powerful Kiwai village just

across the river, is ever trembling at Tirio black art. Spells have even been cast on various magistrates, though without much effect, I am afraid. But with the natives it is different and, inasmuch as it has probably been one of the reasons for your brother's long absence, I want to give you some idea of this powerful evil and the hold it has on natives of all tribes and races.

"Sorcery out here is undoubtedly the greatest curse of native life. Most sorcerers, if not all, are old men, who in many cases work on the credulity of the villagers for their own gain. If a man wants a love charm, he goes to a sorcerer: if he wants to get rid of an enemy, he goes to him likewise; and of course he has to pay for what he wants. The mere suggestion that he is bewitched is often enough to kill the victim, although I do not mean that every death is brought on by auto-suggestion only. The Rev. Mr. Chalmers stated definitely that at Kiwai poison is given secretly, but what these poisons are is impossible to say. The sorcerer's outfit as a rule consists of pebbles, small bones (sometimes human ones), pig's bristles and similar articles which for some reason may be credited with potency. Charms may be worked primarily by obtaining a part of a person's body, such as a lock of hair, parings of nails, or scraps of food. That is why a native is always exceedingly careful about their disposal. Having obtained something connected with the person about to

be bewitched, the rest is easy and, if he is a native, he will surely die.

"Now the reason that I speak of all this is because your brother, after leaving Daru, where he bought a launch from a trader named Perkins, sailed from this island with his black boys and Perkins for Sumai, that Kiwai village on the Fly. Here he secured Kiwai boys (I might insert that in New Guinea all black men are 'boys') who frequently go up the river on head-hunting expeditions, and are therefore familiar with the first hundred miles or so of its length from the sea. Perkins left him at Sumai, and returned here with his own boys. I have talked to him again to-day, and he tells me that Mr. Smith expected to leave that village the morning after he got away. His objective, so Perkins tells me, is a lake somewhere in the interior, and from which for all I know the Fly may rise. He also wished, I believe, to study the races in that part of the country who are supposed to look like black Hebrews. Personally, I take such yarns with the proverbial pinch of salt, although the Gebarubi in this part of the country are a well-made black people with the arched Jewish nose. The interior of this enormous country is still an uncharted mystery, and what natives we know of are head-hunting cannibals. At the present day most people are hazy enough as to where this island continent is located with regard to the rest of the world, and consequently, the popular imagination spins the above-

mentioned yarns. Still, though these lake people be myth or reality, your brother evidently went in search of them. It is over a year since he and his boys sailed up the river from Sumai, and none of them have returned so far.

"When I was in that village last month, I made inquiries. I was told that no one there ever expected to see any of them again. The Tirio, they told me (those people across the river, you remember), had bewitched the whole party because none of them had been asked to join the expedition, and undoubtedly all were now dead. Do not get the idea I believe their sorcery could harm your brother, but as I have tried to explain, it is a tremendously serious thing with these black men, and it may be one of the causes of his delayed return. To my mind the only way this inland country may be properly explored is by power-boat and seaplane working in conjunction.

"I am sorry not to be able to give you more comforting news, but I believe that if Mr. Smith has so far escaped losing his head, he is in all probability a prisoner among the tribes of the interior. You have asked me for frankness, so I have avoided camouflage. If any further word comes, I shall be glad to do as you ask and have a cable from Port Moresby sent you.

"Trusting that this information may be of some service to you, I am

"Very truly yours,

"H. T. Wells."

Lieutenant-Commander Smith laid down the letter, and looked across at his nephew.

"That information is of service to both you and me, Bill," he declared. "You and I are going to spend my leave in New Guinea looking for your father. In order to do so, we are going to take Mr. Wells' advice, and go hunting him by boat and seaplane."

Chapter V

THE EXPEDITION

IF you will turn to your map of the Eastern Hemisphere, you will see that the Island of New Guinea lies one hundred miles north of Cape York, Australia, the northeastern extremity of that island continent, and divided from it by a body of water called Torres Strait. The great port of Sydney, Australia, the capital of the province of New South Wales, was therefore the logical starting point for such an expedition as Lieutenant-Commander Smith contemplated in order to search for his brother in the up-country wilds of New Guinea.

A month after the events related in the last chapter found uncle and nephew aboard a Cunarder, bound for England, and three days later they boarded a P. and O. liner whose ultimate port of call was Sydney.

It is no part of this story to detail the pleasant and interesting days of the next five weeks. Suffice it that the ship stopped en route at Malta and Port Said; then on through the Suez Canal, where Billy from the steamer's deck watched with interest Arabs and their camel caravans trudging the sands of the desert through which the narrow canal has been cut.

From Suez they steamed through the Gulf of Suez and down the Red Sea. Billy remarked to his uncle that it might better have been named the Red Hot Sea—so terrifically warm was the weather. Then after passing through the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, they landed for a day in Aden, where they had its one tree pointed out to them, and continued on across the Indian Ocean to Colombo, Ceylon. Here the ship coaled, and Billy saw his first catamarans, those seaworthy canoes with outriggers with which he was later to become so familiar. The lad was also much interested in the native boys who swam out to the ship lying at anchor in the harbor and, climbing aboard, would dive into the shark-infested waters for silver pieces thrown by the passengers.

From Colombo, the ship sailed south and a few days later, at the exercises which always attend the crossing of the equator, Billy was initiated into the mysteries of Father Neptune.

Eventually, the great liner steamed into the roadstead of Perth, the capital of Western Australia, to touch next at Adelaide, and then at Melbourne. And one morning early Billy awoke to find that they were steaming up Port Jackson, the beautiful harbor of Sydney, New South Wales.

It seemed to him as he hurriedly put on his clothes and went out on deck, that instead of entering a harbor, they were sailing up a chain of lakes, as the great ship wound its way between low-lying hills covered

with semi-tropical vegetation, green and pleasing to the eye after the long sea voyage.

Eventually, they landed; and, after finding rooms at one of the larger hotels, Commander Smith set out to present letters he carried to the Australian naval authorities, while Billy stretched his sea legs in a walk about the city.

Returning to the hotel in time for lunch, he found his uncle in the sitting room discussing their expedition with an Australian naval officer. Billy was presented, and after five minutes' chat, the officer left and the two Smiths went down to the dining room to lunch.

There his uncle told Billy that he had had a long session that morning with the port authorities who had been extremely courteous. They had offered him every assistance possible, and had even radioed Port Moresby, for the following reasons: As it was his intention to use both a seaplane and a small sailing vessel of light draft, preferably one with an auxiliary engine, on their hunt into the Fly River country for Billy's father, the Commander had naturally thought Sydney the best place to obtain both boat and plane. However, after talking it over with the officials, he learned that no craft of the type he wanted was at present for sale in Sydney, and the authorities suggested the possibility of picking up a small sailing vessel at Port Moresby. They also told him that a wealthy New Guinea planter near that port had ad-

vertised a seaplane for sale. He had been an aviator during the war, and for some time had taken a keen interest in aeronautics; but, as he expected to leave for England, he wished to dispose of the plane at any price. Therefore, a radio had been sent to Port Moresby, and sometime that afternoon the answer would be telephoned from the official receiving station in Sydney.

In the meantime, the difficult problem was how best for them to reach Port Moresby, a matter of almost two thousand miles from Sydney, should the answering wire from New Guinea prove satisfactory as to the purchase of the sailing vessel and seaplane. The only steamer that touched at that port would not leave Sydney for another three weeks, and naturally, Commander Smith did not wish to waste that time. Of course, there were stores, provisions, articles of trade for the natives, etc., to be got before they left Australia, but that would take only a few days. Yet it looked very much as if they would be forced to wait for the regular steamer.

Before leaving America, Commander Smith had added substantially to his arsenal of rifles and revolvers, so that they had brought with them arms to fit out both themselves and members of whatever crew they took to man their vessel.

During the long, hot afternoon, the two sat waiting in their sitting room for a message from Port Moresby. About four o'clock it came. Their tele-

phone message told them that just the type of boat they wished was now in the harbor of Port Moresby, and that arrangements could be made for a sale. The New Guinea planter had also wired that the seaplane was in excellent condition, and mentioned a price that was considerably below what Commander Smith had expected to pay.

The Australian officer whom Billy had met at the hotel, and from whom the telephone message came, also said that if they dropped into his office the following morning, he might be able to give them more hopeful news of reaching New Guinea earlier than they might by the regular steamer.

After dinner at the hotel and a visit to a vaudeville show that evening, Billy and his uncle went to bed feeling that their first day in Sydney had been well spent.

Next morning, bright and early, they repaired to the office of the Port Commander, and there learned that one of the Thursday Island pearl luggers which had unloaded her cargo in Sydney, was about to sail the following day for the pearl fisheries at the great barrier reef. The skipper had been persuaded to carry Commander Smith and Billy, together with what stores they might have, as far as Thursday Island. This island lies at the northern extremity of the Cape York peninsula, on the southern side of Torres Strait. From there they could probably get passage across the straits to Port Moresby, in one of

the missionary boats that constantly thread their way through the tiny isles of the straits, carrying men, women and children back and forth, from one post to another on these fringes of civilization. True, the pearling lugger would be forced to spend several days off the great barrier reef on its way up the coast in order to distribute mail to the pearling fleet, but the chances were that the Smiths, by using this means of transportation, would arrive at Port Moresby a week or ten days before the steamer could possibly get them there.

This met entirely with the Commander's approval, and the rest of the day was spent in buying stores and other necessities which he did not believe could be obtained on their arrival in New Guinea.

As the lugger was to sail early the next day, they went aboard late that evening, and found her to be of about eighty tons burden, manned entirely by Japanese. Nikko, the captain, was a pleasant little fellow, and the five hands speedily set to work to stow their luggage in the smallest space possible. They found that every available place, both above deck and below was crowded with diving gear and supplies. Their quarters consisted of two bunks in the main cabin, which smelled horribly of pearl shell and copra. By the light of a swinging oil lamp, Billy could see that the place was swarming with huge cockroaches, which darted in and out between the bales of merchandise, piled to the roof of the cabin. This was

indeed a change from their luxurious apartment aboard the P. and O. liner, on which they had sailed from England some five weeks earlier. But, as the Commander remarked that they were likely to find themselves in worse places than the cabin of the *Ahu Ahu*, for such was the schooner's name, Billy made the best of things, and stowed his own personal gear in his bunk.

As the night was warm and clear, and the cabin exceedingly stuffy, uncle and nephew took a blanket apiece, and went up on deck. But here they saw that things were almost as crowded as below. The lugger, according to Nikko, carried a cargo of extraordinary variety . . . hardware, bolts of calico, soap, lumber, jewelry, iron roofing, cement, groceries, phonograph records, an unfortunate horse and several pigs—those inevitable deck passengers in the island trade. There were scores of cases of bully beef and ship's biscuit—the staple luxury of the modern Polynesian—and, most important of all, four heavy bags of mail.

However, Nikko, who was all smiles and shining teeth (which may have been occasioned by the Commander's present of a box of cigars), spread a couple of mats for them in one of the few open places on the port side of the deck, and they lay down, thankful that they would not be forced to breathe the fetid air of the cabin.

Across the harbor, Billy could see the lights of

Manley beach twinkling, and for some time he amused himself by watching the night lights of the various craft at anchor about them, and the ferry-boats plying their way to and fro. Upon his suggesting to his uncle that it was just the night for a swim before going to sleep, he was surprised when he learned from the Commander that Port Jackson is alive with man-eating sharks. He was told that the bathing-beaches of the Australians are invariably located behind wooden piles such as we use in ferry slips, sunk close together in crescent shape, forming a pool, from which the sharks have been driven.

Nikko, who was standing by, and happened to overhear the conversation, said, "You watch me, mister—I show um shark to you."

With that, he fetched a lantern, and one of the crew brought a piece of meat which he had tied to a heavy line. While the captain hung the lantern over the side, illuminating the water below, the sailor dropped the meat overboard. It had not dangled there more than a minute, before Billy, who was watching closely, saw a huge body rise from the depths. There was a swish and a swirl, and for an instant he caught sight of a great, white-bellied shark, which snatched the meat in its wolf-like jaws, snapped off the line and darted away with its prey.

"Ah, you see um—what I tell you?" smiled Nikko, as he drew up the line and showed where it had been cut off clean as with a sharp pair of scissors. "Big

fella, that shark. If you want lose um hand, stick in the water. Shark take um easy as meat."

After this startling exhibition, Billy thought no more of swimming, and presently his eyes closed and he dropped off to sleep.

He was awakened early by a bustle on deck. Although it was yet dark, the sailors were busy at the halyards, and he saw the sails run swiftly up the masts. There was a gentle breeze blowing, and soon they were on their way.

Then Billy remarked a phenomenon he had not noticed before, aboard the electric-lighted liner which had carried them to Australia. Of a sudden it was day. Not as day comes in our land, slowly, with a faint gray light in the east, gradually increasing as the sun's rays top the horizon and overspread the sky, to brighten the blue and bring forth another day. For as Billy stood there, the black of night, as if painted out by a luminous brush, leaped into light, a dazzling world. Sea and sky seemed dipped in silver, and on the water danced a million points of fire. Billy drew a long breath at the wonder of this miracle. And then his mood was shattered by the prosaic call to "Chow!"

Breakfast was a hodge-podge of mysteries to Billy, who had never before eaten Japanese cooking. But the meal, on the whole, was palatable, though he was surprised to learn later from the cook, who spoke a

little English, that the principal ingredients were nothing more than bully beef and ship's biscuit, with a few Japanese condiments and herbs added.

When they went above once more, Billy asked his uncle to tell him something about the great barrier reef they were heading for.

Commander Smith smiled. "Don't they teach you youngsters geography at school nowadays?" he asked with pretended annoyance. "But I suppose they do, only the trouble is that you don't pay attention and you forget it. Pin back your ears and listen now, young man, because I don't want to have to go over it again. You probably know that the northeastern province of Australia is Queensland. About five hundred miles north of where we are now, the lugger will begin to parallel its shore. Well, the Great Barrier Reef of Australia lies about two hundred miles off the Queensland coast and extends for a distance of twelve hundred miles right up to Torres Strait. It is formed entirely of coral, hard as the hardest rock, and many a ship has ripped her steel plates and gone to the bottom on submerged spurs of the reef. Of course, the captain of a pearling lugger like the *Ahu Ahu* knows the intricacies of the reefs as you do the Naval Air Station at Hampton Roads; but in stormy weather it is a dangerous place at best. The pearl oysters that these Barrier Reef divers go after attach themselves to the coral below the sea

level, and I have always heard that to watch Japs dive for pearl shell is something one doesn't forget in a hurry."

Time aboard the lugger passed swiftly for Billy. A strong breeze continued to blow from the southeast, driving them along at a speed that fairly ate up the sea-miles. The boy soon made friends with the Japanese crew and, active as a cat, would swarm up the mast with them whenever their skipper ordered the men aloft. The crew all spoke a little English, and when one of them was not busy, Bill would sit on the cabin hatch listening to yarns of pearling and the great barrier reef. The quest for sunken treasure holds no stronger lure than the search for pearls. Fortune and death walk hand in hand to spirit the diver to the inevitable brink, groping through the slime, stumbling across the dead sea floor, staggering ahead to win the prize. Pearls are indeed the reward of hardship and suffering.

Those days aboard the staunch little ship while she worked her way steadily up the Queensland coast passed all too quickly for Billy. But with the nights it was a different thing. The boy and his uncle continued to sleep on deck when sleep was possible. The reek of the stuffy cabin, and its cockroaches, precluded all possible comfort and, as the weather remained clear, they both preferred the hard planks of the deck to a bunk below. Yet even here the voracious beetles would not let them alone. While the

crew snored on in the forecastle, oblivious and apparently immune to the attacks of parasites and to the motion of the vessel, these annoyances which seemed to swarm from every crack would display a decided liking for any part of the body either of the Smiths had exposed.

At last, one morning about ten o'clock, the helmsman called the captain and pointed excitedly toward a spot on the horizon off their starboard bow. Billy, half guessing his reason, climbed the mainmast shrouds, and sure enough, away to the northeast he could just make out a tiny speck. Then as the minutes grew, he discerned the masts and spars of a number of vessels.

"Yes," said his uncle, as he reached the deck again, "Nikko tells me that the pearling fleet is over yonder. He wants to fill up whatever space is left in the hold with pearl shell before continuing on to Thursday Island, so we shall get a chance to see several days' diving."

"Gosh," exclaimed Bill, "I'd give everything I've got to go over the side in one of those diving outfits the men have been overhauling. Of course, trying it the first time I shouldn't expect to bring up many very large pearls, but I might find some. Then I could help out on the expenses of the expedition. Do you think I might, Uncle Jack?"

"Perhaps," replied the Commander. "I'll see what Nikko has to say about it. Of course I don't

want to interfere with the routine of their work, and you mustn't forget, Bill, that we are only passengers."

But he winked at the boy's gloomy face as he cupped a match to the bowl of his pipe, and Billy knew then that if the Japanese captain consented, he would soon be learning the mysteries of the submerged coral gardens at first hand.

Chapter VI

WITH THE PEARLING FLEET

IT was late in the afternoon before the *Ahu Ahu* reached the pearling grounds. Almost immediately small boats were seen leaving the sides of the luggers and making for where they had cast anchor. A flag signifying that the *Ahu Ahu* carried mail had been run up their mainmast, and this was quite sufficient to bring visitors.

As the dories pulled over the quiet ground swell of the Pacific, Billy and Commander Smith, seated on the forecastle hatch, watched the scene with keen interest. To the east, possibly half a mile away, but seeming nearer in the still, tropic sunshine, and running north and south as far as the eye could reach, were the half submerged reefs of the Great Barrier, —such reefs as Billy had never dreamed of. It was the amazing variety of color that almost startled one with its brilliancy. His uncle had told him that the reefs were of coral formation, and Bill's idea of coral being those strings of pinkish, reddish beads one sees in shop windows, he was totally unprepared for the sight that met his eyes.

Mile upon mile of low-lying flower gardens in full bloom, a perfect galaxy of color, scintillated as if diamond-studded in the afternoon sunlight, while the

wash of slow-beating breakers receded, leaving them exposed to the eye. Giant flower gardens these, whose blooms of solid coral, harder than the toughest granite, have taken on a variety of form and hue that only the imagination of Mother Nature could conceive and bring forth. Near the *Ahu Ahu* lay a considerable fleet of pearling luggers, mostly two-masted schooners like their own, bobbing and swaying on the glistening, sapphire waves, as if bowing their greeting to the new arrival. Nearer the reefs the ocean turned to emerald green, and then to the milky white of its breeze-blown spray, as the ground swell broke upon the coral. It was indeed a sight to wonder and marvel at.

Soon the water near the *Ahu Ahu* was alive with small craft. Smiling faces shouted cheery greetings and every one jabbered Japanese; although the words were unintelligible to Billy and his uncle, the faces of these sailors and pearl divers were so expressive one could almost guess their meaning.

As one by one they came aboard for mail and supplies they were presented to the Smiths by Nikko, and Bill was told that if he would come aboard their vessels for a month or so, they would make a first-class diver of him. Glasses of sake were passed around, and presently these friendly people took their departure.

As it was too late to start in pearling that afternoon, the crew brought out their diving gear; and,

although Billy knew that they had spent hours on the voyage going over every inch of it and that every one, including their sharp-eyed captain, was certain that all was in order, they set about inspecting and testing it again under the supervision of Nikko.

Everybody aboard the *Ahu Ahu* was awake before dawn next morning, and when the day broke bright and clear a chant of thanksgiving was sent up by her crew. Breakfast was hurriedly eaten and the day's pearling began.

Wild and extravagant have been the theories advanced as to the origin of pearls. But to-day science appears at last to be shedding light on that mystery of the ages and ascribes their origin to a trematode or parasitic worm. The worm when alive does not apparently induce pearl formation, but only acts when death overtakes it in some parts of the oyster.

To quote from an authority: "The dead worm still retains the form of a parasite, and the oyster, unable to rid itself of this evil, covers it with a pearly or nacreous secretion precisely similar to the lining of the shell. On the nucleus, concentric layers of infinite delicacy and beauty are deposited, probably growing at the same rate as the thickening of the shell itself."

The Commander was explaining this to Billy when one of the sailors brought up a prodigious heap of woolen garments from the cabin. These, one of the divers seated on the cabin hatch began to put on.

Although the water at the ocean's surface is tepid enough in the Tropics, its depths hold all the cold of the frigid polar regions. The Jap slipped a tiny image of Buddha fastened on a ribbon around his neck, then donned two cotton singlets, a woolen sweater the thickness of a sack, a heavy sash bound several times about the abdomen, socks, leggings; and, finally, two pairs of long woolen underdrawers completed the list of underclothes for the trip!

It required two assistants to help the man into the next garment, a stiff waterproof suit, with tight-fitting rubber gauntlets gripping his wrists. Then last of all came a heavy metal corselet of twenty pounds, and boots weighing thirty pounds. The *Ahu Ahu's* sails were now backed to hold little of the breeze, and the lugger's speed reduced to one knot per hour.

The diver lifted himself over the side and submerged to the waist. Two of the other sailors placed sixty pounds of lead on his back and chest to keep him down. Air was turned on, and the long length of air hose hissed into the helmet. This was jerked into position on the corselet, and all was now ready for the descent. Looking as hideous and formidable as any sea monster, he waved them farewell and committed himself to the deep. The same two men who had adjusted the weights payed out the air tube and life-line, until a signal jerked on the life-line was answered by loosely making it fast to the vessel.

The life-line now did service as a tow rope, towing the submerged diver in the wake of the *Ahu Ahu*. Above the sea bed, the diver regulates his drift, which is remarkably even, by controlling the air pressure valve on the side of his helmet. And, by an ingenious series of signals jerked on the life-line, he is able to regulate the maneuvering and sailing of the lugger. Immediately upon locating shell, a signal is jerked up the rope, which is then allowed to slip out with the air hose, and the vessel continues on her course as before.

Great care is always taken when gathering open shell, for on being disturbed, it closes with a snap, and with the grip of a vise. After he has gathered it, the diver places the shell in a net bag hung in front of him. He jerks a signal up to those on deck, and is hauled back to his original towing position. And so he goes on with his work.

This type of diving not only necessitates keen perception, quick decision and speedy action, but the man beneath the waves must have perfect coördination with those aboard his vessel. The risks are, of course, great, but a very large area can be covered, and the increased haul is deemed by these experts commensurate with the extra hazard involved. Japanese divers frequently work in ten fathoms all day long, without any apparent inconvenience or reaction, only coming to the surface for an occasional blow, and a smoke.

The real danger occurs, however, when divers are collecting shell at the extreme depths of thirty and thirty-five fathoms. The water pressure at this depth is from eighty to ninety pounds per square inch, and no man ever stays on the bottom more than three minutes at a time.

However, when diving at thirty fathoms, the anchor is always dropped. The diver at once goes overboard. Upon reaching the bottom, he signals accordingly, and gathers the shell with all the haste possible. The men on the lugger signal down to him as soon as the three minutes have expired. He is then brought to the surface in stages, which permits him to gradually readjust himself to the diminishing pressure. The shells found at these depths are generally large and of fine quality; also, they are more plentiful, due no doubt to their having been fished to a less degree. Occasionally, a rich clump of shell will tempt the diver to prolong operations on the bottom, but by doing so he incurs the risk of paralysis and death. Should those above receive no signal in answer to their warning, the diver is slowly hauled up, arriving at the surface either a corpse or a paralyzed wreck. In the latter case, he is at once lowered to ten fathoms and allowed to remain there for several hours. He is then raised to the surface by hourly stages. In many cases recovery is complete.

All day long, this human trawling for pearl shell went on, until, at the end of the day, a huge pile of

pearl oysters lay on deck. Then, small tables, mere boards fitting with hooks to the side of the bulwarks, were set up, and the cleaning began. Marine growths were scrubbed off, and the edges clipped. The opening is done by placing the hinge of the shell on the deck or table and carefully forcing a broad knife down between the edge of the shells so as to sever the abductor muscle. Then the shell springs open of itself. The flesh is removed and minutely examined by sight and touch, for pearls. These are usually found embedded in the mantle, where they may be detected as soon as the shell is open. Occasionally, valuable pearls are taken from blisters on the surface of the shell itself.

After Nikko and one of the sailors had opened a shell by this process, it was passed on to another man, who roughly cleaned it, and threw it down the hold where it was stowed away, since long exposure to the sun's rays impairs its quality.

The gathering of pearl shell continued during the next day. The hauls had been exceptionally good. As the vacant space in the hold had been filled and there was no more room aboard the lugger wherein to stow shell, the captain decided, after cleaning up that night, they should get under way for Thursday Island. Billy showed his disappointment keenly at not having a chance to go beneath the waves in the diver's suit, but his uncle was just as anxious as he was to make the descent; so, after a chat with Nikko,

the Commander came back to him with the news that in their interest the captain had put off starting until the following noon, and that the next morning they should both try their luck at diving.

It seemed hours to the boy, while next day his uncle remained beneath the surface, so anxious was he to don the diving gear and go a-pearling himself. In reality, it was only a little over an hour.

"How was it down there?" inquired the lad, as the Commander was hauled up to the side and his helmet unscrewed and lifted off preparatory to his coming aboard.

"It is certainly something you will never forget," declared his uncle, struggling over the low bulwarks. "Like flying, it is harder than it seems. But you'll know soon enough for yourself. Just remember the signals if you get into trouble down below."

Billy found at once that there is not much fit to a diving suit. The same one that the Japs had shoehorned Commander Smith into was miles too big for him. But the grinning little yellow men making jest of his concern, stowed him into it. The boots were clamped on, and lifting his leg over the side, the sailors placed him in a sitting position on the bulwarks. Then came the heavy weights on back and chest and almost before he knew it, the tightening of the screws on the corselet and the jerking on of the helmet told him the supreme moment had arrived. No experience, even that of flying, had ever held for Bill so

many anticipations and qualms as that first descent.

The water closed over his head, and he sank on the end of the thin life-line, surrounded by a mysterious and uncouth environment. With the invisible and unknown lurking on every side, he felt overwhelmed by the power of the infinite, and with a hissing and buzzing in his ears, he dropped into the whirlpools lying endless below him.

The sun projected its rays in a dance of shimmering beams, coming, going, and changing as they were refracted or deflected by the rippled surface. All about the lad were walls of opal green, through which darted the dim shapes of fish, flashing silver. Then came a singing in his ears, a suffocating sensation, and he touched bottom.

Billy quickly turned a valve to admit more air, and then a strange thing happened. He felt as if he were growing imperceptibly larger; his suit inflated, and like a submerged cork let go, he turned a somersault and sped to the surface, head down.

The appearance of his two feet emerging from the ocean provoked much laughter aboard the *Ahu Ahu;* for, when Bill was eventually hauled to an upright position, he could see through his porthole that both his uncle and the Japanese had broad grins on their faces.

The captain came to the rescue and readjusted the valve, and again Billy slid down the sunbeams. This time, the descent with the added weights they had

placed on him at the surface was like sinking a stone. With great difficulty he began actually to walk on the bottom, struggling against the current, which flowed in a twisting torrent, bowing the fields of weeds and other growths before it. Several times he tripped and fell, but managed, not without great difficulty, to get on his feet once more. He wandered through clumps of marine plants, swaying to the flowing tide, while gaudily marked fish darted hither and thither like brilliantly plumaged birds in this under-sea wilderness.

Slowly Bill gained confidence and at last signaled to those above to haul up the anchor and get under way. He could hear above the continual singing in his ears the clank of the winch which in turn was followed by the slow upward trend of the chain.

In order to keep the life-line as short as possible, Billy gradually advanced with the vessel, while the winding of the chain drew her forward until she rested directly above the anchor. A movement along the marine growths, an uprooting, a muddy cloud, and the *Ahu Ahu* drifted free. Link by link the anchor went upward and a signal from above warned him that the lugger was about to start.

The life-line tightened, and he felt himself being dragged forward. The speed gradually increased, and by careful adjustment of the valve, he began to rise slowly, moving like a submarine aquaplane.

Over a tangle of fernlike fields, he glided, over

rank weeds and the splendor of the coral. All about him wonderful rainbow-colored fish swam in never-ending shoals. Strange creatures peered at him through the greenish gloom, only to dart away, frightened by this ungainly floating object. But above all, it was the superb riot of color that caught his eyes and held them. Like an uncontrolled garden, this under-surface wilderness overawed Bill by its unutterable loveliness, at the same time seeming to engulf his senses by its abject loneliness.

Bushes of pink coral, trees of red, antlers of blue, dotted the seascape on either hand, while directly below he made out green spires and rounded knolls stained with umber, gaps and holes and patches of sand. He saw no pearl shell; in fact, he had forgotten to look for it, so intent had he become on the wonder of this new world. Then of a sudden his heart stood still: on either side of him out of the green murk appeared a wolf of the undersea—that curse and terror of every diver—a man-eating shark.

The pair of great, white-bellied monsters kept darting at Billy only to turn aside just before they reached him, as if undecided as to whether he was really food or not. Billy knew that sharks, unless ravenously hungry, rarely attack a diver, but he of course had no way of ascertaining whether or not they had already breakfasted! Should those cruel jaws snap upon the air-hose, he would be dead before he reached the surface.

Frantically, he pulled on the life-line, signaling to those above to haul him up. He was rising now, but the big fish, half shy at first, were gaining courage and it was only by wildly waving his arms that he was able to keep them off. Bill knew he was nearing the surface, but those above seemed to be pulling very slowly. If he could only make them understand the vital need for haste! Then the larger of the fish swooped at the sagging air hose. Billy saw him grasp it in his teeth, and shake it as a terrier shakes a rat. There came a choking sensation, and Billy knew no more.

Chapter VII

NEW GUINEA AT LAST

WHEN Billy awoke, he found himself lying flat on the deck of the *Ahu Ahu*, stripped to his underclothes. The lugger's captain was bending over him, moving his arms up over his head and then back again to his sides, in order to force an artificial respiration. As the boy opened his eyes, Nikko's friendly face answered his gaze with a smile, and just beyond he caught sight of his uncle looking anxiously down at him. He was dazed and ill, but presently the life-giving air brought back his senses completely and, as the captain desisted from his labors, Billy sat up and leaned weakly against the cabin hatch.

"That was a narrow squeak, Bill," said his uncle. "If you hadn't been so near the surface when that shark snapped the air-hose between his jaws, we never would have been able to bring you around. Take a swallow or two of this, my boy, and you'll soon feel better."

He handed Billy a glass; and, after the lad had drained its contents, he managed to get to his feet, and sat down on the hatch.

"Just cast your eye forward," suggested the Com-

mander. "There's a trophy almost worth while going to Davy Jones for. Though I must admit," he added, "that it can't be much fun playing at being bait."

Bill looked toward where his uncle pointed, and was surprised to see that a huge shark had been suspended to a ring on the bulwark, and trailed its ugly tail over the side. Commander Smith put an arm across his shoulders and together they walked over and inspected the brute.

"He measures just twenty-two feet from nose to the tip of his tail," remarked the elder Smith. "The crew caught him for you as soon as they had got you aboard. Nikko tells me they will make you a watch chain of the teeth. And by the way, lad, if it hadn't been for their pluck—three of those Japs jumped overboard in the face of that monster so as to get you over the side the quicker—well, I'm afraid we wouldn't be chatting together now. You certainly owe them a vote of thanks. When we get to Thursday Island, I intend making all the men a handsome present in your name."

Billy, who was feeling more like himself now, shook hands with each member of the crew and expressed as best he might his gratitude for his rescue. The men and their jolly little captain made light of the matter and complimented him on remembering to send up the proper signals while he was facing the sharks below the waves.

Three days later when the *Ahu Ahu* sailed into the roadstead of Thursday Island, an emerald isle set in a cluster of charming islets, and came to her anchorage, Bill bade these little yellow men good-by with real affection and regret. True to their word, they had fashioned him a marvelous chain from the teeth of the shark, while he and his uncle reciprocated with gifts of money.

No sooner had their anchor been dropped than a number of large dug-out canoes put off from the beach. A small navy of Thursday Island craft were presently paddling around, clamoring to take any one who wished to be put ashore. The Torres Strait people employ the double outrigger; and, rigged in European fashion, these canoes can sail equally well on either tack. As the canoes came up to the lugger, they dropped their sails and, bringing out paddles, kept their craft stationary against the five-knot current. Big fellows, these Torres Strait islanders were —strong limbed and well set up. Most of them were clad in nothing but a breech-clout with strings of beads or a crescent-shaped mother-of-pearl ornament pendant on their brawny chests. Some had a single hibiscus flower over one ear, its flaming scarlet a sharp contrast to the jet-black skin of the native. Still others wore feathers of gayly plumed birds in their hair. One or two were attired, greatly to their pride, in cast-off trousers or other odd bits of European garments; but they were the exception.

These natives pushed their frail craft as close as they could to the lugger, at the same time doing everything possible to keep their competitors off. A good-natured lot, they were as eager as mustard to ply their trade. A quarter of a mile behind them the small township nestled cozily along the waterfront at the base of green slopes verdured with waving grasses. Offshore to leeward of the *Ahu Ahu* lay a large fleet of pearling luggers, resting from their labors. And as Billy watched, others came sailing into the harbor, deep-laden with mother-of-pearl.

At last his uncle was ready to leave; and, after seeing their luggage and stores placed aboard several of the canoes, they clasped hands with Nikko and his plucky crew once more and, taking seats in another of the out-riggered craft, departed shoreward.

"I wonder whose plane that is?" Billy remarked to his uncle as they got under way, at the same time pointing to where the seaplane lay moored a hundred yards or so from the beach. "It looks like an HS boat. Don't you think so?"

"It is an HS2," declared Commander Smith as they drew nearer. "Though what an American plane is doing in these waters is beyond me."

But the mystery was soon explained; for shortly after they had stepped ashore, a jovial, pleasant-faced Englishman walked up to them.

"Commander Smith, if I'm not mistaken?" said he.

"I'm the man," replied Billy's uncle.

"Arthur Stevens is my name," declared the newcomer, offering his hand, which the Commander grasped.

"And that's the plane, lying out there, about which you corresponded with the Port Authorities at Sydney?" asked the Commander.

"Righto!" answered Stevens, and gave Bill a hearty handshake, as his uncle introduced the boy. "You see," he went on, "I have diggings over here, and—but the beach is no place for explanations." He beckoned to a group of natives who were standing near by. "These fellows are my boys," he announced. "With your permission, I'll have them move your stuff up to my place. There is no hotel here of course, so it's up to you chaps to let me be your host while you are on Thursday Island."

Arthur Stevens was that type of planter one frequently meets in the South Pacific, jolly, hospitable, a dominant personality used to having his own way. Before the Smiths could offer their thanks, he spoke to the foreman of his command.

"Araua," he ordered, "you bin taken this feller luggage along home first time. Fetchem quick, feller, close up we stop!"

In answer to this amazing jargon, the "boys" marshaled by Araua, placed the Smiths' belongings on their broad black backs and disappeared townward.

Commander Smith protested his thanks and his

regret at their intrusion, but Mr. Stevens would hear of no apologies and led the way after his men.

A twenty minutes' walk brought them onto the grassy slopes behind the little settlement. Presently, in the midst of large and luxuriant flower gardens, they came upon Mr. Stevens' diggings.

The house was a low rambling bungalow of nipa wood, thatched and completely surrounded by deep, screened piazzas. They found lunch awaiting them on the veranda, and partook of an excellent meal which contrasted with the nondescript food they had had aboard the lugger. The snowy white of the napery and the silent and efficient black boys who waited on them came as a relief after the careless serving of ship's biscuit and sardines, and the other tinned goods which comprised their meals on the *Ahu Ahu*.

During luncheon, Mr. Stevens chatted affably on various topics, but when cigars had been lighted, he came to the matter in hand.

"You probably have been wondering how I happened to fly the plane over here," he said, leaning back in his chair. "The long and short of it is that Wells, who is R. M. for the Western Division—you had some correspondence with him before leaving the States, I think—looked me up while he was at Port Moresby. He knew you would want a plane, and having met your brother—this young man's father, I take it,—has developed a strong interest in

your expedition. Wells is a mighty good sort. I told him of the radios you sent from Sydney, and knowing that you hoped to get started just as soon as possible, we took your affairs into our own hands. I hope you don't mind."

Commander Smith answered that he was delighted to receive help and advice from two men who knew both the country and conditions so well, and was profuse and sincere in his thanks.

"It was a bit cheeky of us, I must confess," smiled their host. "But I think what we have arranged between us will facilitate things. Wells' territory embraces the Fly River country. He has been resident magistrate in the West for ten years and without doubt knows more about that part of New Guinea than any other living man. He has snaffled a six months' leave from the government and proposes with your permission to join your expedition. You'll be fortunate in having him, for he speaks a number of the native languages, and that fact alone would make his presence invaluable."

"Of course, I shall be glad to have him," broke in the Commander. "How can I ever thank you chaps for all you have done and are doing for Bill and myself!"

"Oh, I haven't done such a great lot," said Mr. Stevens easily. "Wells has been the prize mover. Say no more about it. As I said before, we got together and decided it would be foolish for you to

travel all the way to Moresby, so Wells had the *Dorothy*, the sloop you engaged by radio, fitted out. He placed a crew of his Parama boys aboard her with orders to go on to the Fly estuary, and wait for you there. Then he sailed for Daru in his own cutter, where you are to pick him up by plane and the three of you can fly from Daru up to the estuary together. Daru Island is about a hundred and fifty miles across the Straits from this place; and then you only have a hop of a little over a hundred miles to Sumai, where the *Dorothy* will be waiting. The Straits are Australia's commercial highway to the Orient and all the big liners stop here. As I think you know, I am on my way home to England for a year; so I ran over here in the old bus, and will catch a ship for Sydney next Sunday. Now, if you chaps feel like it, we might go down to the beach and take a look at the plane."

On their walk to the shore, the Smiths learned that Mr. Stevens, who had served with the Australians during the war, had bought the HS2 from the American forces after the armistice. This cleared up the mystery of how an American seaplane happened to be moored at that moment in the harbor of Thursday Island. The aircraft they found in A1 condition. The Commander deciding that they ought to get under way as soon as possible, Mr. Stevens had his boys bring their luggage aboard that evening, so they might make an early morning start.

They spent the night at the planter's house and, directly after an early breakfast next day, walked down to the beach. Here his boys paddled them out to the plane, which he had named the "Swallow." Then after they had donned their flying clothes, Mr. Stevens bade them a friendly Godspeed and his paddlers backed off twenty yards or so. Billy and his uncle cranked up and presently with the Commander at the wheel they were skimming the smooth surface of the harbor with the speed of an express train.

Soon they left the water for the air, and Billy looking down from his seat beside his uncle could see that the beach was black with people. Of course, an airplane was no great novelty to the Thursday Islanders, for Mr. Stevens had flown across the Coral Sea from Port Moresby many times before, but with the sound of the motor, every inhabitant, white or black, had run down to the shore. Now they stood waving good-by, as the Commander circled the little settlement, and after giving the crowd a farewell "zoom," turned the "Swallow's" nose a point or two east of north and headed out to sea.

The "Swallow's" air speed they knew to be seventy-five knots per hour, and allowing for the wind, Billy figured that they would pick up Daru Island which lies close to the mainland of New Guinea, west of the Fly Estuary, in about two and one-half hours. It seemed impossible that in so short a time after leaving the peaceful and civilized colony of pearl

fishers on Thursday Island they would be at the threshold of a great land where dwell crude denizens of the Stone Age in all their barbaric savagery.

The night before, Mr. Stevens had presented Bill with Captain Hurley's book on New Guinea and the boy remembered the explorer's description of these waters over which he was now flying, for these words had appealed to his imagination. Captain Hurley had written:

"Few passageways of the sea hold so much of rude adventure and romance as Torres Straits. Spanish and Portuguese voyagers in search of treasure lands passed this way only to meet doom upon the reefs, unrecorded save for copper fragments and corroded coins bared by storms along the coral reefs and brought to the eyes of a wondering world by the pearl divers. What became of the crews of the vessels? Were they butchered mercilessly by the bloodthirsty hordes of the neighboring shores? Or were they accepted as supernatural beings and permitted to mingle with the tribe and so indelibly stamp certain featural characteristics upon present generations? Could this account for the marked Spanish and Hebraic types that to-day inhabit the regions contiguous to the reefs where relics of wrecks have been found and brought to the surface?"

Then Billy remembered that it was in an endeavor to learn more about these Jewish-looking headhunters and cannibals that his father had come to this strange,

far-off land. He thrilled with the thought that soon he would behold the New Guinea shore behind whose grim portals he devoutly hoped he would find his father.

When he looked back again, Thursday Island was a mere blur on the horizon. Avenues of rollicking sea, driven by the stiffening southeast wind, sent the crested waves chasing each other below them. To leeward he could just make out the spars of what he took to be a pearling fleet, and ever and anon miraged forms of distant islands slowly took shape on the horizon, only to disappear altogether as the "Swallow" approached them.

Then for a time Billy took over the wheel, and flying a straight course with a stiff wind almost astern, their plane fairly ate up the sea miles. Through a fitful haze appeared at last fleeting glimpses of a low coast, of dun-colored seas and mudbanks.

The boy now steered more to starboard and after another fifteen minutes, he saw a good-sized island at the mouth of a river, and separated from the mainland by a channel about a mile in width.

"There's Daru," wrote his uncle and passed the paper over to Bill. "That river is the Oriomo. Land cross-wind in the roadstead and keep your eye peeled for canoes. We don't want to celebrate our arrival with two or three native funerals."

Bill nodded and, after circling the little island, nosed the seaplane downward and spiraled into a

perfect landing about a hundred yards from shore.

The beach was crowded with natives and the "Swallow" had not yet lost her momentum when they saw a double outrigger put off with a white man aboard.

"Well, here we are at New Guinea, Bill," said his uncle, as they removed their helmets. "Let's hope that when we see the last of it, we shall have your father with us." He caught sight of the approaching canoe. "I reckon Mr. Wells beat us to Daru," he remarked; "for, if I'm not mistaken, here he comes now!"

Chapter VIII

DARU AND THE HORIOMU

DARU, since 1888, has been the headquarters of the New Guinea government's Resident Magistrate for the Western Division. The island lies opposite the mouth of the Oriomo River and is separated from the mainland by a narrow channel only a mile or so in width. Daru itself embraces an area of about two or three thousand acres fringed all round by a deep belt of mangrove. The roadstead carries a fair depth of water and offers good anchorage, which, however, is far better in the southeast than in the northwest season. During the latter, heavy squalls sweep up the coast with great suddenness and whip the harbor into a heavy sea. But at best it is a dangerous roadstead, as Billy and Lieutenant-Commander Smith soon found to their cost.

They had just landed the "Swallow" and with motor shut off were floating quietly on the water, waiting for Mr. Wells, who was being paddled out to them in a native dugout, when they noticed that the R. M. was signaling to them. Wells, standing in the bow of the catamaran, was waving frantically and shouting. As he drew nearer, they made out the words, "Look behind you! It's a guba. Run the plane ashore!"

Obedient to these instructions, the two aboard the "Swallow" glanced seaward and were surprised to see that in the last five minutes thick black clouds had begun to gather. They also noticed that all the craft in the roadstead that had anybody aboard were cutting their moorings and making for the beach.

"A 'guba' is some kind of a storm, that's a cinch," declared the Commander. "Give me a hand, Bill, while I crank up. Make it snappy—we've got to reach the beach if we don't want the old bus wrecked."

So suddenly did the storm break that before they were under way the roadstead had become torn with whitecaps. The sound of the wind was deafening. With all possible speed, they jumped into the cockpit and opening the throttle wide taxied for the beach.

The natives who were paddling the Resident Magistrate had also headed for shore, and side by side the seaplane and the catamaran shot through the breakers. There willing hands with the help of the seawash ran them high on the beach.

Billy and his uncle had no more than stepped out of the plane, when Mr. Wells, evidently a man of decision and forethought, had a gang of native boys at work making the "Swallow" fast. Ropes were thrown over the hull and wing sections and secured to stakes driven into the ground. Everything was done swiftly but with the precision of an air station

watch. Billy saw with surprise that each craft as it came ashore was secured in like manner.

Soon, under the guidance of Mr. Wells, they were running inland toward a fair-sized bungalow a short distance from the settlement but set on piles like the native houses. Rain was coming down in steel rods lashed to fury by the terrific wind. The three threw themselves up the ladder and across the veranda and were fairly blown through the doorway and into the house.

Wells slammed the door and turned to his guests.

"Rather a windy welcome," he smiled, as he grasped their hands. "But one has to be prepared for anything in this land of surprises. The storm will probably die down in an hour or two, just as suddenly as it came up. In the meantime I don't think the plane will take any harm."

Bill and his uncle found this to be the case. By afternoon all was serene and peaceful on Daru again. While the two men planned the details of their expedition up the Fly, Billy strolled about the island. With him went the native constable who spoke some English. The township he found was not a large one; a few stores and private dwellings, the buildings of the London Missionary Society and the Government quarters and offices made up the whole. The heat was extremely oppressive and clouds of mosquitoes swarmed about Billy's head everywhere

he walked, so he was only too glad to take his guide's suggestion that they get aboard a canoe and go out to watch the fishing.

The constable led the way to the beach, and soon they were paddling out to a sunken reef a couple of miles off shore, at that season the fishing ground of the native population. Already the sea above the reef was dotted with small native craft, for it was now dead low tide. Bill had expected to see the black boys either spearing fish or having hook-and-line tussles with the finny tribe, but in this he was disappointed.

When they arrived at the fishing grounds, they came upon men and women wading in the shallow water which was a dull milky white in color. This the constable explained was caused by a poisonous shrub which is pounded and bruised and placed in the reef pools. The poison stupefies the fish which float to the surface and the natives simply gather them in.

This method of fishing lacks interest for the onlooker, and Bill, who thought it a most unsportsmanlike method of doing things, got quite enough during the half hour that they floated in the offing, and was glad when they turned their little ship shoreward.

After dinner that evening they were seated on the bungalow's veranda when the Resident Magistrate's chief boy came up the steps and spoke to Mr. Wells in the native tongue.

After a short conversation the man departed into

the dark of the trees below and the R. M. turned to his guests.

"Awati tells me," he remarked, "that it is time for us to start. I forgot to tell you that I had arranged to take you down the coast to Mawatta to see the Horiomu ceremony to-night. It only takes place once a year and is quite worth watching. With your permission we'll fly down there. The Mawatta expect us, so Awati says, and as no plane has ever before landed at the village, we ought to receive a pretty good reception."

On the way down to the beach, Mr. Wells explained the situation more fully.

"I suppose," he said, "that Mawatta has come in contact with white men more than any other village in the West. For fully forty years this coast has been visited by stray vessels from Torres Strait. Mawatta is a village of some three hundred souls, built on the Bina River. Turituri, which is slightly smaller, lies an hour's walk along the beach to the east. Years before the Protectorate, the Mawatta and Turituri men used to sail away on pearling vessels which put into the Bina for fresh water and vegetables. These people consider themselves quite sophisticated and Europeanized, but you will see to-night that native superstition sticks out through their thick coating of foreign veneer. If manners make a man, clothes certainly do not. I cannot think that the Mawatta man has been improved by wearing a

felt hat and a pair of red-striped trousers, even if he does speak English freely, with an excellent knowledge of its slang. It is quite a different New Guinea you will see when we get up the Fly, but I want you to realize what several hundred years of missionaries and European culture have accomplished. In that way you may get a better idea of what we Government men are up against in the unknown interior."

Upon arriving at the shore, the party found that the "Swallow" had been floated and was lying moored some yards off shore, so they stepped into a dugout and were paddled out to her. The Commander and Mr. Wells took places in the main cockpit while Awati and Billy squeezed in together forward.

When the many-cylindered motor roared into the cotton-packed and helmeted ears of the native, Billy could see the man grit his teeth in an effort to suppress his excitement. Then as they spun along the water, deluged by the spray of their own fore-wash, bouncing to the swell of a choppy cross-current, Awati gripped the sides of the cockpit in uncontrolled alarm. But when, after jerking her onto the step, Commander Smith pulled back his wheel and the "Swallow" left the water entirely, to soar smoothly in the air, the black boy stood up with the wind pounding his naked chest, his lips moving and his arms outstretched as if invoking his native god. For some moments he stood thus, then squatted down

beside Billy and turning toward him, displayed a wide-mouthed grin of appreciative enjoyment.

It was a perfect night. A full moon mirrored its face in the ruffled water below, illuminating the night with the brilliancy of day. To the left lay a limitless ocean, sparkling and shimmering as the moonglare washed its rumpled bosom; to the right, a low and sullen shore, reeking in the sickening stench of mangrove swamps and partially veiled in mist. The land held a sinister look, seeming a fit lurking place for the head-hunting cannibals who inhabited its inland reaches.

After a twenty-minute hop, Bill made out a red dot of light far ahead along the beach. With each succeeding second this grew in size until a huge bonfire could plainly be seen. Then as they drew nearer, a village of native houses broke into view, arranged like beehives side by side along the beach, behind the fire.

Awati pointed excitedly toward the place and Billy saw his lips pronounce the word "Mawatta."

He nodded his understanding, and a few minutes later the "Swallow's" nose pointed downward to alight gracefully on the water at the river's mouth.

From the village a delegation at once put off in long dugout canoes, chanting and waving torches as they came. All were in native dress, which consisted of a queer kind of legging running up to the knee, a breech-clout, strings of beads and nacre ornaments on

their black breasts. The feathers of bright-plumed birds were stuck in their ringleted hair, while bracelets of metal, beads and shell decorated their muscular arms.

The "Swallow" had picked up moorings, a stake driven in the river bed and, as she lay there, this impressive flotilla, eight war canoes of ten men each, paddling in perfect unison to the chant of their crews, circled the seaplane three times. Then the leading canoe drew nearer, and while the others lay on their paddles, came alongside. The man in her bow, a huge fellow with a wonderful headdress, then placed upon the "Swallow's" deck what Billy made out to be a roast pig. After bowing three times, in perfect English he invited the white men to enter the canoe and be paddled ashore. Awati, in the meantime, had explained to Billy that the pig, held a great delicacy by all natives of New Guinea, was an offering to propitiate the devil which made the "Swallow" fly, that it might not cast an evil spell on the village.

"So much," remarked Mr. Wells later, "have several centuries of missionary work, the British government, and contact with Europeans been able to influence and enlighten these people!"

However, every one was very friendly. They found the tribe, which speaks a Kiwai dialect, to be a well-built black race with the narrow head and arched nose which in Papua is popularly termed the Jewish type. Except the men who had paddled out

to meet them, the inhabitants paraded a most amusing mixture of European and native fashions. A print gown from the trader's store may be all right in itself, but when worn over a thick grass petticoat protruding from beneath its nether limits, the effect is ludicrous, to say the least.

The village, they found, was laid out in two streets of pile houses, built European fashion and on European lines. Each house, the R. M. told the Smiths, was occupied by certainly not more than two families, a remarkable thing in communal New Guinea. There was a flagstaff and a small courthouse, a wooden church, and the trader's store. What more could be required?

The guests were led some little distance along the beach and inland to an open space surrounded by cocoanut palms. Here they were welcomed by the chief and given seats at his side.

The Horiomu ceremony in connection with the spirits of the dead, which they had come to witness, is supposed to take place at the beginning of the southeast season. Actually, when it is to be held is decided by the old men of the tribe. The Smiths and Mr. Wells had no more than taken their seats when several of the younger men stalked into the bush beyond the cocoanut palms, and presently from the direction in which they had disappeared came a whistling noise. Immediately there was a great moaning of the women, who were gathered in the

glade. They evinced signs of fear, and cries were put up that the spirits were near by. Mr. Wells explained and translated freely, so that both Billy and his uncle grasped each point of the ceremony as it developed.

Drums made from hollow logs were now beaten and the women ran off screaming, villageward. The men who were to take the part of the spirits went off to dress in the bush. Two fences were erected, on either side of the cleared ground where the dance was to take place. The women, who had been away to the gardens to obtain a supply of food, returned. The food was placed inside the fences, one of which belonged to the Crocodile-Shark clan and the other to the Cassowary-Dog. The women are not supposed to know that the actors who take the part of the spirits in the dance are living men; they are expected to consider them to be real ghosts. Next, the ladies are grouped at a little distance from where the dancers are to perform, and for possibly ten minutes, except for the whistling noises of the young men waiting in the forest, no other sound broke the stillness of the moonlit glade.

Then, one by one, in Indian file, appeared the spirits, each dressed in a petticoat of young cocoanut leaves, with arms and legs similarly covered. Their faces were screened with masks of leaves so as to conceal the identity of the wearers, and Bill noticed that

each man carried a bow and arrows. Then the dance commenced.

"The idea of the thing," Mr. Wells explained, "is to let the mourners of all those who have died during the last year think that their spirits live. The mourners are over there, back of the palms. You'll see them presently."

For a long hour the dancers moved about in the enclosure of the fences, as if acting out a pantomime, the meaning of which Billy was not able to fathom. Sometimes their movements were spritely and ludicrous, but more often slow and monotonous, and all the time to no other sound than the intermittent beating of the drums. But eventually it was over, and Bill was not sorry.

The dancers disappeared into the bush and the oddest procession imaginable, looking much more like ghosts than the departed dancers, came out from behind a clump of palms.

"The mourners," whispered Wells.

The procession, twenty or thirty females, wound its way about the grove to come to a stand before the chief. The mourning costume, which is worn from periods of from six months to a year, consists in covering the body with a white mud, with two long fringes of frayed leaves hanging from the neck, one which falls in front and the other behind. A ghastly crew they were, and the bright moonlight but accentuated their ugliness.

The other women of the village now left their places behind the fences and, surrounding the mourners, rid them of their mourning apparel and clothed them once more in their usual garments. Then every one, audience and performers of this odd ceremony, set off for the village, bearing the food the women had brought before the dance and stacked inside the fences. Soon a feast was under way.

Billy was surprised to find how good were some of the native dishes, especially when washed down with the delicious and cooling milk of a young cocoanut. Later, a pipe of peace and goodfellowship was passed round and the guests were escorted back to the "Swallow."

"There will be chanting and individual dancing later," Mr. Wells said, as they got aboard, "but if we are to get away for the Fly to-morrow early, we ought to turn in at a respectable hour to-night. To-day you have seen something of civilized New Guinea; to-morrow you will drop into the other side of things."

Chapter IX

INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

THE next forenoon, the "Swallow" took off, with Commander Smith and Mr. Wells in the pilots' seats, Billy and Awati packed in forward. Every available stowage space below the decking was filled with supplies.

They flew out above the shallows of the Tauru passage, and the Commander ran the "Swallow" up to about three thousand feet. The mists which always hang like a screen between Daru and the estuary of the Fly prevented lower flying and the course was laid by compass alone.

Suddenly, there came a torrential downpour and a few moments later, the "Swallow" passed into bright sunshine and calm. To the east could be seen Parama Island, while to the west the mainland stretched away, its banks covered with eternal mangrove.

Eventually they turned north and, flying lower, skimmed the muddy waters of the Fly estuary, which at its mouth is about forty miles wide. Though probably not more than seven or eight hundred miles in length, this mighty stream is said to pour into the ocean as much water as the Amazon. Dotted below them was an archipelago of islets, built up from river

silt, of which Kiwai, thirty-two miles long by four wide, is the largest.

Entering the Fly estuary is like sailing on an inland sea. Billy could see nothing beautiful in the lower reaches of the Fly. Nipa and mangrove, as Mr. Wells had told them, were the prominent features of the landscape, with plenty of mud and muddy water thrown in.

The heat was intense. Even the breeze of the speeding seaplane did not alleviate it. The sun's rays beat down with tropical fierceness, and the stench of the swamps was sickening.

Presently, as the "Swallow" ate up the miles, Bill espied three small villages of the single Long House type. Then some distance further up the river, larger villages appeared, one on either shore; and off the eastern bank, a small two-masted schooner lay at anchor.

Down went the "Swallow's" nose and Billy knew the ship to be the *Dorothy*, the schooner Mr. Wells had chartered for them at Port Moresby. At the moment, Bill was more interested in the village, which he was certain must be the settlement of the powerful Kiwai tribe—Sumai, their present destination, and the last place his father had been heard from. Its prominent feature was a huge Long House. He afterward learned it was 520 feet in length by some 70 feet high. The shore was alive with natives. Then the "Swallow" landed close to

the *Dorothy*, and his view of the scene was partially cut off.

Aboard the *Dorothy* her black crew were waving a friendly welcome; and as soon as the "Swallow" had tied up to her mooring, the dinghy put off and the party aboard the seaplane were rowed over to the ship.

The *Dorothy* proved to be a flat-bottomed, shallow draft vessel with an auxiliary engine. Both the ship and engine were antiquated, and in anything but the best condition, but the Smiths knew she had been the only craft available and they were grateful to Mr. Wells for the trouble he had taken in securing her.

Her crew were all picked men and, though but semi-civilized, were good seamen and familiar with the intricacies of the lower Fly. This, of course, was a valuable asset in a land where river pilots are often impossible to obtain.

When the stores from the "Swallow" had been brought aboard, the ship was crowded to utmost capacity. Thanks to Mr. Wells, she carried a complete wireless apparatus, an arsenal of rifles and ammunition, food and gasoline, fuel for the ship itself and for the seaplane, which was to accompany her into the unknown. There was also other equipment, extra sails, spars, halyards, etc., not to mention bolts of bright-colored calico, ribbons, beads, small mirrors and trade knives, presents for the native tribes

through whose territory the expedition expected to pass.

By the time everything had been transferred aboard the *Dorothy*, the afternoon was well on its way. Commander Smith and Mr. Wells wished to question the native chief in regard to Billy's father, so they decided not to start up the river until the following day. Travel by night, on account of uncharted shoals and mudbanks, not to speak of other possible river obstructions, was not to be thought of. Although the black crew and Mr. Wells knew the Fly up as far as Mediri, two hundred miles from the mouth, Billy and his uncle were told that with each flood the entire topography of the river might be altered.

The village of Sumai lay on a slight rise of the river bank, surrounded by dense mangrove swamps, reeking and abounding in mosquitoes. Like all the so-called villages of the lower Fly, its remarkable feature was the communal house. These strange structures are long and, in most cases, high-roofed dwellings, built of nipa and heavily thatched. The "revis" houses the entire community.

The Smith party did not enter the one at Sumai. Upon coming ashore they were met on the bank by the chief and a number of his warriors, and there the palaver took place.

After much questioning, the white men learned nothing new except that no word had drifted down

the river concerning Billy's father or any of the Kiwai boys of his expedition. The chief was at no hesitancy to express his belief that they had either been killed and eaten by the tribes further up the river or, escaping that fate, had fallen victims to the sorcery of Tirio black art. As Mr. Wells had written, these enemies of the Kiwai had cast a spell on Mr. Smith and his Sumai boys, incensed at not being asked to send men to join his party.

The chief told Mr. Wells that these people had also cast a bad luck spell upon the *Dorothy*, but would probably fear to tabu the great flying bird in which the white men had come down from the skies. That, he declared, was undoubtedly too great a demon to be harmed. Mr. Wells laughingly remarked later that this piece of news was the one satisfactory item of their interview.

Back aboard the *Dorothy* once more, the party became interested in watching a canoe which had just put off from the village. The native craft swung out toward them and circled the "Swallow" three times. Then, one of the paddlers reverently placed an offering on her bow.

After the blacks had departed shoreward, Bill and Awati rowed over to the plane. The offering to the "flying demon" proved to be a roast piglet, encircled with green leaves. It was left where it had been placed, at Awati's suggestion, until after dark, when the offering was removed to the *Dorothy*.

Next morning, there was great rejoicing among the villagers, who took the disappearance as a sign that the demon had eaten their offering and was pleased. Had they looked into the cabin of the *Dorothy* the night before, at supper time, they might have had other ideas. The Kiwai know how to roast pigs, and it was pronounced excellent by both whites and blacks aboard the schooner.

Once under way again, Bill guided the "Swallow," which the *Dorothy* had taken in tow. They passed several small villages, set in the jungle, but made no stop. Then, about one o'clock, anchor was dropped off the plantation known as Mediri. This was the white man's last outpost on the Fly. In fact, it was the only plantation for two hundred miles around. A lonely, dreary place Bill thought it, for with Mr. Wells and his uncle, he went ashore. The plantation seemed a failure, and the rubber-trees, although seven years old, were lean and sapling-like. Brown, the owner, seemed heartily glad to see them. He complained that he could not make the place pay, and said he was in daily fear of marauding parties of up-river tribes. Only three days before, he and his black boys had been ambushed and had fought off such a party, but only after a hot battle in which six of his blacks had been killed. He strongly advised the Smith party to discontinue their trip up the river. Yes, he had met Billy's father when he passed up the Fly. He feared that by this time the heads of all

that party ornamented one of the up-country Long Houses, and predicted a similar fate for Wells and his friends if they would not abandon this mad expedition.

Bill was not sorry to bid Mr. Brown and his dismal settlement of galvanized iron shacks good-by. Their party had some difficulty in reaching the *Dorothy's* dinghy, for during their three-hour stay at Mediri, the tide had fallen ten feet, and the shore was knee-deep in slime and wet clay.

That night the schooner anchored in mid-channel, and a strict watch was kept over her. Four times during the afternoon, as the *Dorothy* had followed the winding channel of the river, arrows had flown from the jungle. In every case these missiles went wide of their mark, but they spoke forcibly of the hostility of the natives.

With the full moon silvering the ripples that swished across the mudbanks, the river became a scene of dreamy enchantment. Billy, Commander Smith and Mr. Wells sat on gasoline cases around the cabin's low hood, which answered for a table, and planned the next day's course.

"Now that we're getting up-country," suggested the elder Smith, "it's time we put the plane into active coöperation with the schooner. I didn't make any definite plans before because I wished to get acquainted with the general lay of the land. But during the past twenty-four hours, I have been think-

ing things over, and briefly, my idea is this. Each day, the 'Swallow,' with either Bill or myself as pilot, will patrol a definite area on both sides of the river. We will of course be guided to a certain extent by the topography of the country, always keeping within gliding distance of the Fly or some other body of water. The *Dorothy* will continue up the river, stopping at all river villages, and parleying with the natives for possible news of my brother."

"If Dad is a prisoner inland," remarked Bill, "how do you think he would signal, if he happened to sight the plane?"

"That's hard to tell," answered his uncle. "But from what Mr. Wells says, if he is a prisoner, and still alive, he would probably have the freedom of the native camp. The blacks would know that without food and outside help, he could not escape through these almost impenetrable swamps and jungles."

The Resident Magistrate knocked the ash out of his pipe. "You must remember," he declared, "that this is a land of fetishes and tabus. I daresay, Commander, your brother would have little trouble in setting up a flag of some sort. The natives would think it was a tabu against evil spirits. Far back from the river, on our right, that is, to the east, lies a mountainous country. It is a territory absolutely unexplored, so I don't know what the chances are for streams and lakes as landing-places. The country I

am speaking of is the far-famed land of the Papuan pigmies, and it struck me that Mr. Smith, being an anthropologist, interested especially in little known races, may possibly have gravitated in that direction."

Bill, who had been listening attentively, suddenly spoke up. "Will you let me take the plane over that way to-morrow, Uncle Jack?" he asked.

"Yes, son," returned the Commander. . . . "You might take Awati along as observer. He ought to be valuable, in that respect. All these natives can see like hawks and very little should miss him, with the aid of my field glasses. But remember, Bill, this is serious, I might say, life and death work. I know I can trust you, but if Awati should make out a signal, you are not to carry on the campaign on your own initiative. Reconnoiter the place, and then report back as fast as you can fly to the *Dorothy* for orders—understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Bill, who knew that the Naval Officer expected brevity when he used that tone of voice. It pleased the boy enormously that his uncle should place such confidence in him, and later, he found it almost impossible to settle down to sleep, so keen was he for morning to come.

Had Bill known what the next twenty-four hours held in store, perhaps he might have been less impatient.

Chapter X

TRAPPED!

BILLY, with Awati seated beside him in the pilot's cockpit, made an early start next morning. A Lewis gun had been mounted in the fore cockpit, for the Commander knew that should a forced landing be necessary, a machine gun is a handy weapon in a country inhabited solely by head-hunting cannibals. Both Bill and his black companion were armed with a revolver and heavy express rifle apiece. There were also six days' rations stored in the "Swallow's" lockers and her gasoline tanks had been filled to capacity.

"Safety first, lad," replied the elder Smith in answer to Bill's remark that it seemed a waste of trouble to stock up the plane so extensively for a three or four hour hop. "Always go up prepared for the worst in a hostile country. That's the best advice any one can give. Remember that so far as the natives go you are flying over enemy territory. Also, if you are forced to land in shallow water, make it a power landing as far back on the step as possible. That will cause the 'Swallow' to skim the water, using little draught until her momentum slackens. It may prevent a crash or being stuck as we are this morning."

He looked ruefully over the side, for low water that morning had left the *Dorothy* high and dry on the edge of a mudbank. It would be some hours before the river would rise sufficiently for the ship to float off.

There was a handshake all round, then Bill and Awati climbed over the *Dorothy's* stern, which overhung deep water and, dropping into a dinghy, the two were rowed by one of the crew to where the "Swallow" tugged at her mooring.

It was a lovely morning. On either side of the river green walls of creeper-covered trees cut the blue of a cloudless sky. Gorgeous butterflies darted from one bright-hued flower to another, birds sang in the trees, and above the rustling tree-tops, could be heard the drone of a million flying insects.

The take-off was against the current, with all aboard the *Dorothy* waving Godspeed from her deck. The "Swallow" skirted the green wall of trees, then soon mounted high above them.

As they rose Bill could see thousands of birds disturbed by the noise of their motor circling just over the tree tops. Behind them lay the *Dorothy* on her mudbank, while a mile or so farther around a curve in the river Awati drew his attention to the long, high-peaked roof of a tribal communal house.

As far as the eye could reach the broad river sparkled through an almost endless jungle of mangrove swamp, with here and there a tributary stream

or small lake cutting the everlasting green. Now more than ever did the boy realize why his uncle had decided on a seaplane rather than one with landing gear. This country—this part of it, at any rate—was one gigantic inland waterway. Far to the north he knew lay the Strickland River, the Fly's greatest tributary, and that half-fabled body of water, Lake Murray. But it was to the east that Bill's eyes wandered, and pressing the right rudder-bar, he turned the "Swallow's" nose in the direction that had been planned the night before aboard the *Dorothy*. Soaring up and up, he could at last make out a higher country in the far distance. This he knew to be the Aramia highland beyond the headwaters of the Bamu. Then, as Awati pointed excitedly, he saw with his field glasses, peaks of the Owen Stanley range.

Attaining a height of about four thousand feet, Bill followed one of the larger streams, a feeder of the Fly, to its headwaters in a swampy lake. Then he sent the "Swallow" up to six thousand feet, and spotting another lake to the eastward, pointed her nose toward it, lessening his altitude as he drew nearer to his objective.

They had continued in this manner, jumping as it were from lake to lake, for over an hour and a half, when the mangrove swamp ended. The ground or what they could see of it became higher, and soon broke into hills. Possible landing-places, waterways, lakes and the like became less frequent, and Bill took

some dangerous although absolutely necessary chances.

The "Swallow" was flying over these hills with high mountains just beyond, when the motor commenced to miss. Bill had decided it was about time to turn back and fly slightly to the north on the return journey, when the motor trouble complicated matters. Awati had spotted no evidence of human beings below them except an occasional Long House or group of native huts, and it had been no part of young Smith's plan to cover the same ground on their trip back to the Fly. About a mile to the east lay a small lake, and for this he now pointed the "Swallow's" head.

Two minutes later the motor refused altogether to mote. Bill saw it had now become a question of whether they would be able to make the lake or not. He did not like to think of that "or not." It is anything but pleasant to "pile up" in a forest. Even if he and Awati were not both killed in the crash, he knew they could expect little less than death from the savages they happened to encounter. But worst of all was the thought of wrecking the plane, thereby diminishing the chances of his father's rescue. Never would Bill believe that his beloved parent was anything but a prisoner.

Now, however, the lad had other things to think of. The black beside him, although a brave man, was showing signs of nervousness in his clenched

hands and set face. He knew their common danger as well as his pilot. But he sat quite still, and when Bill happened to throw him a glance, Awati responded with a cheery, toothful grin.

The boy, on his part, was using every flier's trick he knew to keep the "Swallow" in the air,—to make her glide further. But try as he would the trees rose toward them at an alarming rate. Had it not been for a glen running back from the lake, the "Swallow" would never have made the water. At all other points the shores were covered with dripping trees. Then, to add to Bill's troubles, it began to rain.

As they swooped down toward the tree line, Bill noticed that the glen was spotted with native huts of a type he had never seen before. Not a living soul was in sight.

Just beyond the brink of the lake Bill was forced to level off, and praying for deep water, he landed well on the back of their step. For a moment the "Swallow" plowed the lake's smooth surface, and then gradually losing momentum came to a stop some little distance offshore. Bill had made a perfect landing.

The two in the plane threw off helmets and goggles and looked about them. The lake was a small one, possibly two miles long by half a mile wide. Densely wooded on all sides, the only break in the forest was at the village end where they had come down.

"That was a pretty close shave," said Billy. Then as he saw a frown of misunderstanding on Awati's black face, he added, "We came very nearly landing in the tree tops."

"Awati no afraid," the black replied contemptuously. "Massa Bill heap feller good fly man. Awati more afraid now bad feller black boy along village."

"Do you think they will try to kill and eat us?"

"Awati think they make one big feller try. Bin take em heads for house—make A1 big feller chop with everything else.—Maybe not," he went on as an afterthought occurred. "This feller boy no bin see white man. He afraid 'Swallow' now—go hide in woods. Soon come back—paddle out here—see Massa Bill—you white not black—maybe this feller boy think Massa Bill white devil. Awati no can say. He hope along best."

"We'll give a good account of ourselves with the Lewis if they get nasty," declared Billy. "In the meantime I'll try to make this motor mote. You keep your eyes peeled for your friends in the bush, Awati."

"You bet um dollar," said the black, and with such seriousness that Bill had difficulty restraining his amusement. Not for anything would he have hurt the black man's feelings, for he knew Awati to be a faithful fellow who would stick with him to the finish, come what might.

For possibly an hour Bill tinkered with the engine

in a vain search for the seat of the trouble. Then Awati attracted his attention shoreward. Twenty or thirty black warriors were gathered at the water's edge in front of the village, evidently discussing this strange visitor.

Presently a canoe with five of the boldest aboard put off and paddled slowly in the direction of the plane. As they came nearer, Bill saw that in the bow had been placed a mound of green stuff.

Awati immediately became elated. "Black feller boy say Massa Bill and Awati big feller devil. He bring um chop—vegetable. Now Awati make palaver. Maybe can talk feller language. If black boy shoot arrow, Massa Bill shoot gun." He tapped an express rifle, so Bill picked it up and stood ready to meet violence with violence.

About ten yards from the "Swallow" the natives stopped paddling. They were small men, the tallest as he stood with his paddle dangling in the water not over four feet at most. In spite of the rain and the chill bite of the air (for in this higher altitude the climate was cold and chill), not an occupant of the canoe wore more than a loin cloth. Billy was surprised to learn later that clothing with these people is unheard of, and they never seem to feel the cold. It came to him suddenly that he was looking upon the mysterious pigmies of the interior—the very people Mr. Wells had mentioned last evening. They were strong-looking little men, with large heads, and very

long arms, their hands, when dropped to their sides, quite to a level with their knees. None of those in the canoe carried any weapons that he could see.

During all this time Awati had been speaking. At first he got no answer from the pigmies. But eventually their leader, who stood in the bow, replied with an amazing volubility of clucks and grunts.

"Me find black feller boy speak along language me can speak," said Awati.

It might be mentioned that Awati invariably spoke of all other natives as black boys, and as though his own ebony skin had been lily white.

"Me tell him Massa Bill big feller white devil. Me say Awati devil too—but not so big as Massa Bill." He grinned at his joke and then went on. "Me tell him Massa Bill, air devil, water devil, fire devil. Me say Massa Bill point feller gun stick—man dead." Awati motioned toward the rifle in Bill's hands. "Chief say you kill um one his feller black boy, but not along him. He say no you can do. You show um, Boss."

"I don't want to start in by killing harmless people, Awati."

"Yes, you shoot um, Boss. He bin no good," said this cold-blooded product of New Guinea.

Bill shook his head. "No, I'll shoot that bird over there, instead," he declared. "Go ahead and tell the chief I spare his man's life, Awati."

For a moment, the two blacks palavered, the one

on the plane, the other in the canoe. Then all the men aboard the canoe turned their eyes toward where at the water's edge a large, crane-like bird stood on one leg and preened its feathers.

It was with a good deal of misgiving that Bill raised the rifle to his shoulder. Not that the shot was a difficult one, but a miss just now might cause serious trouble. He fired, and the crane dropped as if it had been poleaxed.

But Awati had omitted to mention to the pigmies the noise that went with the firing! As the report ricocheted down the lake to reëcho in the surrounding hills every man aboard the canoe dived and swam for the shore as if the devil himself were behind him. With one accord the natives on terra firma disappeared into the forest.

Awati clapped his hands as the crane dropped. "Good feller work," he crowed. "Soon black boy bin come back. We stop along house. Get out of wet."

"Do you think they will continue to be friendly?" Bill asked.

Awati shrugged his shoulders. "Who can say?" he replied. "Maybe he ask Massa Bill do something he no can do. Then we lose um our feller heads." And with this unpleasant prediction Billy had to be content.

Chapter XI

PRISONERS

THE two in the plane waited a full half-hour before the pigmies recovered sufficiently from their fright to reappear at the edge of the lake. Cautiously, by twos and threes, the little black men came stealing out of the jungle and stood in groups on the shore by the village. From their gesticulations it was evident that they were still undecided as to whether or not this strange, white devil-devil would harm them. But presently the men who had been in the canoe swam out to her and paddled slowly over to the "Swallow." A conversation between their leader and Awati ensued.

"Him say Massa Bill bin A1 big devil-devil," the faithful black translated. "Me tell feller black boy you, me stop along village. Him say fine."

"Good," remarked Bill. "Tell him to tow us ashore. Then when we've fixed up this motor trouble, we'll shove off again."

Awati shook his head. "Me fraid no easy," he grumbled. "When feller black boy make friend along devil-devil, wantum stop along village all-time. But no else can do now. Me bin tellem tow us in."

Awati's English grew a bit jumbled at times, but the Kiwai boy did not lack brains. He threw a rope to the pigmy, and the canoe paddled toward the village, with the "Swallow" moving slowly along behind.

Once ashore Bill saw that the seaplane was properly beached, and then, with Awati, sat down to a feast in the chief's hut. The meal was augmented with some tins of canned meat from the "Swallow's" lockers, and this delighted their host. The chief looked astonishingly like a little old Irishman, with his long upper lip and tufts of woolly hair beneath his chin. Bill, who was unable to pronounce his name, dubbed him "Old Pat" on the spot.

Old Pat proved most friendly. While the meal of yams was cooking (these people have little else in the way of vegetable food, not being sago eaters like the coastal tribes) the chief took great pride in exhibiting his collection of human heads. These gruesome souvenirs rested on shelves or in niches along the walls of the hut. They had been smoked and badly stuffed in order to preserve them, and the result was horrible in the extreme. It was not exactly an appetizing sight for a weak-stomached person; but Bill, who was fast becoming used to New Guinea customs, and was ravenously hungry, suffered no lack of appetite.

Old Pat appropriated the meat tins for ornaments,

and adorned himself by hanging them about his neck. He seemed inordinately proud of these new decorations and permitted none of his tribesmen to touch them.

The rain had stopped by the time the meal was finished, so a tour of the village was made. Bill found it to be a settlement of between thirty and forty thatched cottages of a type much more European than anything he had seen so far in New Guinea. That these diminutive men and women were utterly primitive was evinced by their lack of clothing. Yet each cottage had its own garden in which yams, taro, and tobacco plants had been laid out, and each little plot held its many-colored flowers.

Although the afternoon was Marchlike in its chill, the pigmies showed no signs of feeling the cold. Bill, to the contrary, found his leather flying jacket most comfortable. But Awati, used all his life to the torrid heat of the coast and swamp countries, began to suffer intensely. He did not complain, yet when Bill got him an extra sweater from the "Swallow," his chattering teeth showed in a broad grin of appreciation and pleasure.

Upon returning to the shore, they found that offerings of yams and tobacco had been laid on the forward decking of the plane. A large group of men, women and children squatted some yards distant chattering and pointing at the strange flying

devil-devil. Then Bill, with Awati as a none too skillful assistant, commenced a general overhauling of the motor.

This ended by their finding that the jets were clogged. Evidently Port Moresby gasoline was a dirty product, and the lad decided that in future his gas would be properly filtered before he ventured into the air.

Night had fallen by the time the trouble had been located, and with it swarms of mosquitoes rose from the vast swamps to the west. These bloodsucking pests minded the cold not at all, and Bill was only too glad to hurry to the cottage which had been set apart for Awati and himself. Once the narrow door had been barred, and a wood fire built upon the pile of ashes in the middle of the dirt floor, they lay down in their clothes and prepared for sleep.

But for Bill sleep would not come, and during long hours he lay on his hard bed going over the events of the day in his mind, and wondering whether his uncle and Mr. Wells would be able to take any steps to follow them. Before turning in, Awati had said that the pigmy chief was so delighted to have them as his guests, he had told the Kiwai boy they must stay with the tribe always. Their puripuri (magic) he said would bring the village luck and act as a powerful tabu to the tribe's enemies. In fact, Old Pat had more than hinted he would take particular pains to see that his visitors did not leave. The

chief, Awati declared, was a wise old man, and now that he had taken their arrival out of the blue as a good omen, he and his warriors would prevent the "Swallow" being floated at all hazards.

So far as those aboard the schooner were concerned, Bill knew that the trackless swamps lying between the Fly and these hills would prove too great an obstacle. His flight over them that morning had showed him that. He therefore figured that the *Dorothy* would continue her course up the river and onto the headwaters of the Strickland. From that point, so much nearer the mountains, it might be possible for the expedition to make a search on foot back through these hills. But New Guinea is huge and Bill began to realize that the chances of his uncle coming upon this far-away lake village were mighty small. Presently the lad's tired body relaxed and he dropped into a fitful doze.

With the first streak of day, the village awoke. Upon opening their door, Bill tripped over two sentries, armed with spears, squatting in the dust. Old Pat had taken no chances of his devil-devils making a midnight exit.

The unpleasant and tedious job of cleaning the "Swallow's" jets was begun after breakfast. It proved slow work and the numbing cold of early morning penetrated to the bone.

As the sun rose higher, the temperature rose in proportion and by midday both mechanics had shed

most of their garments and were perspiring copiously. This hill country was certainly a land of climatic extremes and Bill as he worked wondered whether these daily changes from cold to equatorial heat down through the generations had been the cause of the natives' diminutive stature.

By one in the afternoon the job on the plane was completed. Bill and Awati both took a dip in the lake and after a good wash were sunning themselves on the beach when Old Pat put in an appearance.

The old native grinned at Bill and, after squatting on his heels, began to talk to Awati. He clicked and grunted in the dialect for fully five minutes, then prepared himself a wad of betel nut and stuffed it into his mouth while the Kiwai translated to his master.

A young man of the tribe, it seemed, had come across kangaroo tracks some distance from the village that morning. He had just reported his find and the chief had come to suggest that his guest, the great devil-devil should make the day a propitious one by joining in the coming hunt.

Bill, of course, was anxious to fly back to his uncle and the schooner just as soon as possible, for he realized the worry and uneasiness his continued absence must cause. But he knew that for all the chief's polite phrases, he and Awati were as much the prisoners of the tribe as though they had been bound hand and foot upon arrival. Release, he felt sure, could

only be obtained by means of careful strategy and by keeping in the good graces of this ugly little black man. And then he had never hunted kangaroo.

He smiled and nodded his pleasure and acceptance; and the old chief, after giving them both a wide grin of satisfaction, got to his feet and went off to make preparations.

A few minutes later Bill and Awati found the village in a bustle. The young men were arming themselves with spears, and bows, and arrows, and presently about twenty warriors congregated before the chief's cottage. As they stood in a half circle before the low doorway with the rest of the tribe gathered in the background, several women appeared and presented each hunter with a piece of ginger. In parts of New Guinea this is considered a powerful hunting charm for men and dogs and weapons, and no hunt is undertaken without it.

When the ceremony of the ginger had been got over, Old Pat motioned to Bill and started off for the forest with Awati and the other hunters following in single file.

They had walked possibly three miles through a tangle of semi-tropical vegetation, in which only a native could find his way without a compass, when one of the chief's men suddenly made his appearance from out the underbrush beside the small stream they were paralleling. This man conferred with Old Pat, who turned and spoke a few sharp words to his

followers. These words must have been in the nature of an order; for the hunters immediately dispersed into the bush, leaving Bill and Awati and the chief standing by the stream.

The three, squatting on the ground, waited there for half an hour at least, when afar off in the jungle the hoot of an owl was heard. The chief stood up, waited for another five minutes, and then from his throat came the piercing shriek of the green parrot.

Immediately, and seemingly from twenty different points of the compass, came howls and yells and sharp cries. Old Pat started forward and at the same time clicked out a few words to Awati. Then down the stream they splashed, Awati explaining as he ran that they were now about to beat the jungle for the game; that is, that the hunters, having taken their stations so as to form a wide circle in the forest, were now advancing so as to converge upon a common center, driving all animals that might be ahead of them as they went.

Fifty yards downstream, Awati pointed to the farther bank and continued on his way, while Bill waded across the rivulet whose icy waters came well up to his armpits before he reached the opposite shore. But he paid no attention to his soaking clothes and, scrambling up the steep incline, forged onward into the forest, shouting as he ran.

As he hurried along, he guessed that the other tribesmen had got a start on him; for the forest ahead

rang with harsh native yells. The going, as he left the little river farther behind, gradually became more difficult to navigate and he was forced to drop into a fast walk. At times the jungle appeared almost impassable. Thorns and creepers caught at his legs. From above the great vines, which hung from the branches, entangled themselves with the tree-trunks and underbrush and formed walls and screens of living green almost impossible to worm one's way through. Without the help of his hunting knife, Bill would have made little or no progress.

Presently a wide clump of bamboo appeared before him, through which there was no going at all. This he was forced to skirt for many yards before it ended as suddenly as it had begun. Now that he was getting nearer to the center of the drive, he made out the forms of terrified animals darting between the tree trunks. These, of course, he made no effort to stop. Only an army could have prevented every beast within the encroaching circle from making its escape.

At last Bill passed from the thick bush into a narrow glade walled with tall tree ferns and hanging vines. As he ran, he spied a terror-stricken bandicoot (one of the smaller marsupials of the kangaroo family) loping down the glen toward him. The little fellow, looking for all the world like a miniature kangaroo, and about the size of an Airedale terrier, hopped at a surprising rate of speed on its long

hind legs. Bill had lowered his spear, when a number of small wild pigs, also terrified by the noise and din of the beaters, rushed across the glade. One of the frightened little beasts, darting between Bill's legs, tripped him up and sent him sprawling.

Later he had cause to thank that piglet, for its advent undoubtedly saved his life. When he fell, the bandicoot was but a few yards from him and intent only on its flight. Then Bill, flat on the ground, saw a remarkable thing take place. A few paces ahead a low branch bridged the glen and, as the bandicoot darted forward in a long hop which would have carried it well over Bill's prostrate body, a flat, mottled head shot down from the branch and through the air with the noise of a giant lash. The bandicoot, as though caught by a lasso, was trapped in mid-air, and a moment later the constrictor had drawn its struggling prey upward and disappeared with it into the heavy foliage.

Bill did not stop to watch the snake's retreat along the limb. He knew that often such reptiles hunt in pairs, and he realized that, had he not been tripped by the piglet, and had not the bandicoot taken his place, he would at that moment be having his body slowly crushed to a pulp in the snake's great coils in some leafy bower overhead. Now as he scrambled to his feet and ran on, he threw anxious glances upward. This animal drive and hunt was not turning out such tame sport after all.

At the end of the glade he passed through another strip of dense jungle undergrowth to come out on a wide meadow-like expanse covered knee-high with flowering grasses. He could now see the other beaters, still shouting and yelling like black demons, slowly herding seven or eight kangaroos and as many cassowaries (tall birds who resemble ostriches or the Australian emu) toward the middle of the woodland plain. Bill found himself slightly behind the other hunters but, running swiftly, he caught up with the line closing in upon the game, and continued to advance with them.

Of a sudden, one of the large male kangaroos decided to break his way out of the encroaching circle of tribesmen, and before Bill knew exactly what was happening, the other kangaroos following their leader rushed toward the beater next on his right. The pigmy stood his ground, and as the herd came plunging toward him, he cast his spear at the leader. But the big marsupial swerved, and the weapon instead of striking a vital part, caught the beast in the shoulder.

With a scream of pain the animal leaped for the man and brought its heavy tail into play. This caught the native above the knees with the force of an iron flail, breaking both legs and tumbling him head over heels. But the furious beast was not yet satisfied. It jumped for its antagonist, and burying horse-like teeth in the wounded native's side, lifted him up and shook him as a mastiff shakes a large rat.

At that moment Awati and Bill, who were nearest in line, ran up and plunged their spears into the animal's belly, and the kangaroo dropped in his tracks and rolled over dead.

It now seemed to Bill that pandemonium reigned in the meadow of colored grasses. The kangaroos, far from becoming disheartened by the death of their leader, fought with the savagery of the cornered. The lad had thrust his spear into the throat of one who was worrying a wounded tribesman, when a cassowary with neck outstretched, darted angrily at him. Unable to withdraw his spear, he left it where it was and dodged behind a near-by group of natives, tugging at his revolver as he ran. But before he could draw the gun, he saw the big bird shoot out a leg and send a man spinning. Quick as light, Old Pat ran in, dodged the vicious stroke of the bird's beak, and stabbed it in the lower part of the neck. Stopped in full stride, the cassowary stumbled, fell and then lay still, a huddled mass of legs and feathers.

Looking about him, Bill saw that four kangaroos had been slain, together with three cassowaries. The others, having eluded the hunters, were now in headlong flight for the bush into which they bounded a minute later and were lost to sight.

The losses, however, were not confined to the hunted. Four of the pigmy tribesmen proved to be badly wounded, while a fifth, the man whom the

male kangaroo had attacked, was already dead. But the little men had evidently discounted the perils of the hunt beforehand. With a callousness typically Papuan, they left the wounded where they lay and danced around Bill and Awati in high glee. The hunt's success, the Kiwai told the lad, they attributed to the presence of their guest, the great white devil-devil. Undoubtedly the savages thought none the less of him for flying from the enraged cassowary. Discretion was perhaps recognized as the better part of valor, although natives who can not count over five at a time, are not given to much moralizing or the questioning of motives.

Bill suggested that the dance of joy be brought to a close and the wounded attended to. So presently rough hurdles of branches bound with pandanus fibers were fashioned at the edge of the jungle, while Bill and Awati saw to the tribesmen's hurts and bound them up as best they might. Both the wounded and the game were then lifted onto the hurdles; and, after some instructions from the chief, his huntsmen started off for the village with their burdens. Bill was about to follow when Awati stopped him.

"Feller chief say him, me, you go along short way. Black boy bin go along village easy way," he declared.

"The shorter, the better," replied his master. "I'm as hungry as—as a hunter, and after a good

feed I'm going to take a rest. I didn't get much sleep last night."

But as things turned out Bill was much farther away from the coming feast of kangaroo steaks than he thought. The three left the woodland meadow in Indian file, the pigmy chief leading and Bill bringing up the rear. With that uncanny sense of direction which seems to be inborn in many of the more savage New Guinea tribes, the black threaded his course through the jungle often making detours where bamboo clumps or other obstacles barred the way, but never hesitating in his journey forward. Old Pat kept up a pace something between a run and a walk which Bill began to find extremely tiring. The lad tripped often over roots and rocks hidden by the rank undergrowth which the native ahead of him seemed to sense instinctively. Try as he might to keep his eyes focused on the ground before him, the thought of the constrictor in the glade would return, and he found himself ever and anon glancing upwards into the dense green of the foliage. Then without warning something happened that sent all thought of boa constrictors from his mind. The air was suddenly filled with arrows and Bill Smith found himself battling for his life.

Chapter XII

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN—

FROM the undergrowth on both sides of the narrow glen a horde of yelling savages sprang forth. Bill had just time to note that these natives were pigmies like the chief (probably of another tribe) when three of them grappled with him. He knew afterward that had the blacks wished to kill him, they could have done so almost at once, for while two of the little men attacked him in front, the other dodged behind him and sprang upon his back. Quick as thought, Bill caught at the arm encircling his throat, and bending sharply forward, catapulted the savage over his head and into the stomach of one of his fellows. In the instant's respite that followed the lad managed to draw his revolver and, as the third native raised his stone-tipped club to strike, Bill pistoled him.

A swift glance ahead showed him that the glen fairly swarmed with black men. The reason only three had so far attacked him he attributed to his distance in the rear. But his shot startled and frightened these pigmies, and those who were bounding toward him, stopped short.

On the ground several yards away Awati was

struggling in the center of a heap of stunted blacks who were doing their best to bind his arms and legs with fibers. Bill took aim at their leader and again pressed the trigger. But this time instead of a report, a faint click was his only answer. The cartridge must be defective. Once more his finger tightened, but there came no answering detonation. The automatic had jammed. Natives were racing toward him now, and seeing that without firearms resistance would be useless, Bill dashed across the glade and scuttled into the underbrush.

Just ahead he saw a rocky outcropping. At this Bill threw himself and clambering up the steep by means of a tangle of vines which partially covered it, he dashed across the top of the ledge and came to a sudden stop. The rock fell away sharply and thirty feet below a wide and sluggish stream curled about its base. To hesitate now meant certain capture, for he could hear his pursuers swarming up the vines just behind; so, leaping out as far as he could, Bill plunged feet first into the river.

With a splash he struck the muddy water and sank, but the river was much deeper than he had thought and he did not strike bottom. Before rising, he instinctively turned so as to face the cliff from which he had jumped and, after coming to the top, took a hasty survey of his surroundings. Shouts of the savages rang in his ears, but so far none of them had reached the edge of the rock. It was then that

he saw a narrow opening at the base of the cliff about which the water swirled. This might prove a temporary refuge at least, so diving again and swimming under water he made for it. Just outside the hole he was forced to come to the surface again, and turning his head was in time to see several black bodies come hurtling through the air and plump into the river. Bill waited to see no more and, taking three quick strokes, disappeared into the opening.

Beneath the rock both the roof and bottom of the cave sloped sharply upward and a few strides forward brought the lad to a small, pebbly beach on which the water lapped. Beyond lay darkness, like an ink-black wall from out of which came the pungent reek of wild animals. Bill stepped out of the water and onto the beach and stood still. For a long moment he remained leaning slightly forward seeking to pierce the gloom, his body tense for the spring of the beast whose lair he knew this must be. Then, as no sound came to him but the lap-lap of the wavelets on the little beach and the yells of his baffled pursuers in the river, he dropped first on his knees and then flat upon his stomach so that his eyes came but little above the surface of the water and peered through the opening.

A narrow swath of the river now met his gaze. Without himself being visible, he could see four natives swimming about evidently at a loss to account for his disappearance. Then one of them, spying the

opening to the cave, started to swim for it, bent on further investigation.

Bill grasped the knife he carried and waited. That he might kill this savage he felt certain, but soon others would follow and it would be only a matter of time before they would discover his hiding place. Such odds meant inevitable capture. The outlook was certainly not pleasant, but come what might, the lad determined not to be taken alive. Far better a quick death from a knife thrust or blow of a club than the hideous agony of New Guinea torture. And that was what it would mean if he permitted these pigmies to carry him off to the village alive. These fellows were head-hunting cannibals, like the rest of the tribes of this savage land, and to be captured of course meant that in the end he would be devoured. Yet what might happen to him once he had been killed bothered Bill not in the slightest, and he waded resolutely into the water beneath the cave's sloping roof to meet his foe.

The water inside the overhang came nearly to his shoulders. Planting his feet securely on bottom he waited just within the shadow where his superior height would give him the advantage that he needed. When the native swam under the rock Bill proposed to knife him before the man's eyes, blinded by the bright sunlight without, could adjust themselves to the dim interior of the cave. Then he would hold him under water effectually shutting off all cries for help until the black drowned.

But all at once there was a swirl in the river behind the swimmer. The ugly head of a large crocodile appeared and a pair of huge jaws grasped the native from the rear. The terrified pigmy emitted one ear-piercing shriek and then he and his captor disappeared beneath the muddy surface.

The other blacks hearing their comrade's scream and evidently fearing a like fate, struck off for shore and passed out of the restricted area of Bill's vision. He fancied that they had made for the river bank beyond the cliff, and as he did not relish the thought of meeting another crocodile homeward bound, when hampered by water that reached to his armpits, he took his way back to the beach within the cave.

For some time longer Bill waited there, watching and listening, but as no further sounds came from the direction of the river he made up his mind that the savages, believing that he had suffered a death similar to that of their tribesman, had retraced their way to the glen. Others of course might be on the lookout from the top of the cliff. Besides that, Bill knew that New Guinea rivers swarm with monsters that menace a horrible death to the swimmer, and he was not keen on trusting himself to the water again except as a last resort. Getting to his feet he started to explore the cavern.

Now that his eyes had in a way become used to the darkness, he could make out the narrow walls of the place. He saw that the rock floor beyond the beach slanted gradually upward until it was lost in the

gloom beyond. The reek of carrion became more noticeable as he groped his way on, but he felt that, were the cave's owner at home, he would have had the uncertain pleasure of a meeting long before this. Anyway, the chance of a savage beast springing out of the darkness was preferable to the thought of what might happen were he forced to take to the river again.

Presently Bill stumbled over a heap of bones; and a little farther on the floor inclined sharply upward, almost reaching the roof. It had been a hard scramble over a rough road in the darkness of the inner cave and the lad sank down tired and discouraged. He knew that he had reached the rear end of the cavern.

For possibly ten minutes he lay there resting. Then, when he had made up his mind that, little as he relished the idea, it would be well to leave this hole in the ground by its one exit, the river, before the animal or animals which inhabited it returned, he felt a draft of cool air on the back of his neck.

Abruptly he sat up. Yes, now he could distinctly feel it on the top of his wet head. He raised a hand to the roof of the cavern and found nothing but the solid rock. Yet the air certainly came from above.

Getting to his feet once more he moved slowly back over the way he had come with his right hand touching the roof. He had gone but a few steps toward the mouth of the cave when suddenly his

hand went through into empty space. Then as he took a step to the left, his groping fingers came in contact with a ledge. Bill grasped this as best he might, and exerting all his strength gradually drew his body upward.

At last he found himself lying on a shelf about seven feet above the level of the lower cave, and after poking about in the darkness he came across a small opening in the wall of rock through which a draft of air was stealing. It was a tight squeeze for the lad, but eventually, after leaving a part of his shirt in the aperture, he found himself in another and smaller cave.

This new cavern seemed to be little more than a passageway; so, stooping to avoid hitting his head against the roof, he crawled slowly along it. Here, as below, the trend was gently upward, and after rounding a sharp turn to the left, he saw the gray haze of daylight creeping down the tunnel. Hastening forward as best he might, he eventually reached a small ledge, or balcony, jutting out from the face of the cliff and screened with the thick foliage of creepers and hanging vines. Up from below came the guttural chatter of natives, without doubt, his late pursuers.

Bill took the utmost precaution to make no sound and peered downward. The living green behind which he crouched effectively concealed his hiding place, but allowed him to obtain an excellent view of

the surroundings. He saw that the balcony on which he stood lay half way up the rock over which he had clambered in his dash toward the river, although at that time he must have passed this nook some fifty yards to the right. Below, through a thin belt of trees, the glen was visible; and, as he looked, he saw the pigmies move off in a body, with Awati and the old chief prisoners in their midst. He waited where he was until the last man had disappeared into the jungle, then ripping the vines aside, he climbed down and darting from tree to tree, he followed in the direction of the departing savages.

The fear that they might be attacked by Old Pat's tribe would keep these pigmies on the alert, Bill figured. He therefore allowed the party to get a good start of him. It was not difficult to follow the track made by so large a body of natives. As he cautiously scouted in their rear, the lad fancied that their village must lie a good many miles away. The territory he was now traveling lay well within the hunting limits of Old Pat's tribesmen. Awati had told him that there were comparatively few communities of these little men. Distant villages were continually at war and took heads from each other, irrespective of racial ties, a trait common to all aboriginal tribes of this savage land.

Why Awati and the chief had not been decapitated immediately upon capture, he was at a loss to understand. Had such been the case he would have

done his best to return to Old Pat's village and make an escape from these hills in the plane, if possible. He had thought, as he stood in the screened entrance of the cave overlooking the glen, of going back to the village for help, but had cast aside the idea as impracticable. He understood nothing of the clicks and grunts which seemed to make up the pigmies' language, neither could he be sure of reaching the settlement by the lake in this tractless jungle. But Bill was sure that unless help came to Awati and the old chief soon after they arrived at the home of their captors, rescue parties would in all probability find the prisoners in the cooking pots of the enemy. Therefore, he followed them.

After cutting through the bush for half a mile, the savages with their prisoners crossed the river at a stony ford and then followed the stream upon a high bluff for half a dozen miles farther. The caravan kept moving toward the higher hills, finally to strike off and cut across a wide plateau, covered shoulder-high with thick, coarse grass. Beyond this pampa their road led up a narrow gorge or gulch between cliffs which ran high up into the hills.

When Bill reached the gorge he decided that his best plan was to climb the ridge to the right and parallel the natives from above, for by doing so his chances of being seen would be greatly diminished. And twenty minutes later he had the satisfaction to see below him, although at some distance ahead, the

band of pigmies trudging along the rocky gulch and spurring their flagging prisoners to greater efforts.

The going was not easy on these hilltops above the gorge; moreover Bill was feeling the strain of the morning's exciting events and the long distance he had traveled since leaving the village for the hunt. But the knowledge that the lives of two men hung upon his endeavors buoyed him up, and eventually he came to the end of the ridge he was following.

He now dropped to the ground, and wriggling forward to the edge of the cliff that dropped away a good five hundred feet, he peered over. Nestled in a tiny valley below, that gave on to the narrow mouth of the gulch, the pigmy village lay. The huts like those of the lake village were primitive structures of thatch and mud, but in this place they were spread along the border of a foamy brook which cut the valley in two. From his place of concealment the lad could see that the warriors and their prisoners had arrived and were holding a powwow. This was taking place before a hut larger than the rest, evidently the house of the chief. Awati and Old Pat lay spread-eagled on the ground, and about them in a semi-circle sat the tribesmen.

It was now late in the afternoon and Bill could see women of the tribe preparing the evening meal. Fires had been lighted under large pots in another part of the village and it took no great amount of imagination on Bill's part to guess what the contents

of these pots would eventually be. He realized that until night came he could do nothing, so with a prayer that the little men in the village below would postpone their gruesome orgy until after dark, he moved back from the cliff's edge and waited.

With sunset came a darkness almost solid. Bill knew that Awati and Old Pat were still alive for the blacks, having concluded their powwow, had commenced a dance of thanksgiving. Through the thin rain that had come with the nightfall, he could see the flare of torches and the glow from the cook fires farther away along the banks of the brook.

While it was still light Bill had planned his road down the face of the cliff, and now with groping hands he grasped the edge and began cautiously to lower himself. The descent, bad enough in daylight, proved even more difficult than he expected, and frequently he found himself hanging by his hands while his dangling feet sought hold on a rocky niche. Every move had to be made with the utmost care and quiet; for any sound on the cliff side could be easily heard in the village beneath him, and a misstep would undoubtedly bring a crowd of sharp-eared blacks swarming about the base. From the direction of the brook came the thump-thump of a drum and the guttural chant of the dancers. These partially drowned the noise of his movements, but Bill felt sure that pickets were on the watch, and his heart

rose in his throat every time he dislodged a stone or loosened a pebble.

But eventually he felt the solid ground under his feet once more, and realizing that he had at last reached the valley he could not see, he sank to his knees and crawled slowly toward the village.

Stealthily he passed from the shelter of the bushes, which grew at the foot of the cliff, into the open space near the outermost huts of the settlement. And now as he drew nearer his objective he could make out the dancers beneath the flaring torches by the brookside, through the openings between the huts. So using particular caution, and taking cover behind every bush and rock, he headed for the house of the chief.

Past two, and then three, of the thatched-roofed cottages he made his way, then rounding the corner of a fourth, he came upon the open space before the chief's abode. A brightly burning torch, stuck in the hard dirt of the little compound, cast into bold relief the figures of the two prisoners. They were lying on their backs as he had seen them during the afternoon, their arms and legs stretched to the utmost and bound to stakes set in the ground. At first Bill thought they had been left unguarded, but he soon perceived the outline of a tribesman's back. The fellow, half turned away from the men on the ground, was watching the dance at the brook end of a narrow lane between the cottages.

Again Bill dropped to his stomach, and now his pace forward became even slower than before. The guard was armed with a spear which lay on the ground beside him, and as Bill crawled closer, he could see the raindrops glisten on the naked back of the pigmy whenever the breeze stirred the flame of the torch.

The lad carried a hunting knife between his teeth, but as he wriggled past the two prisoners he saw that the stone hammer which had been used to drive in the pegs lay but a few feet to his right. To kill a man by sticking a knife into his back, no matter what the conditions may be, is a job no lad worth his salt enjoys. But now Bill saw a way out of his dilemma. Reaching over, he grasped the hammer and, then getting quickly to his feet, he sprang upon the back of the unsuspecting tribesman.

A single blow on the head sufficed to stun the man and he dropped without a sound. Bill wasted no more time upon him, but darted over to where Awati lay and quickly cut the fibers which held him fast. Then, while the Kiwai boy sat up and painfully moved his arms and legs seeking to restore the circulation, Bill released Old Pat.

Because of their stiffened limbs the prisoners were unable to get to their feet; and Bill, who was *afraid* one of the pigmies might pass that way and see them in the light of the compound, picked up the little chief in his arms and carried him into the shadow of

the cottage wall. Then he went back and, passing an arm about Awati's shoulders, helped him over to the shelter of the hut.

He had no more than propped the black against the mud and thatch of the wall and had commenced to rub the poor chap's legs in an effort to restore circulation, when a movement was heard from within the cottage. Then a man stepped through the doorway into the open.

This time Bill wasted no time in a surmise as to whether or not the native would see them. He jumped for the man, and down they went together rolling and fighting in the mud of the doorway. But a pigmy, though strong and wiry, is no match for a white man; and Bill, after choking off the native's wind, gagged him with a handkerchief.

By this time Awati and the old chief seemed to have shed some of their stiffness and came running up. By signs they indicated that both tribesmen be immediately put out of the way, and Awati who had picked up the guard's spear and club started off to kill the sentinel.

But Bill stopped him. He had a plan which he proceeded to carry out. He dragged the man whom he had gagged over to the pegs which had held the chief, and soon had his prisoner lashed fast.

Awati, never slow to take a hint, did likewise for the other tribesman, and as Bill and his two friends rounded the corner of the hut, any villager happen-

ing to pass across the compound might naturally think that the two men who had been captured that day and brought to the village still lay pegged out before the chief's hut.

The three, sometimes running bent over double, more often crawling on their hands and knees, made their way toward the base of the cliff. Once in the shadow they stood upright, and with Old Pat in the lead started to skirt its base. Neither native had voiced any thanks for his rescue, but Bill knew that from now on both of the men would willingly give up their lives for him.

After a five-minute run they reached the entrance of the gulch up which Awati and Old Pat had been dragged earlier in the day. Here the chief stopped and, chattering a few words, started on at even a greater rate of speed.

Awati as he ran explained to Bill that the dance would end in a very short time now, and that when it did the old chief wanted to be as far away as possible. And the little man evidently knew what he was talking about, for hardly five minutes later, Old Pat stopped running. Quite distinctly Billy heard a long, low call from the direction from which they had come. Then followed a chorus of shouts and blood-curdling yells, and Bill knew that either the dance had ended or their ruse had failed. Without a word the chief turned about and the three of them raced down the gully.

Chapter XIII

—INTO THE FIRE

AFTER running at this killing pace for some twenty minutes longer, Bill felt that he could go no farther and said so. The lad was nearly at the end of his endurance, and, whereas these New Guinea natives seemed tireless and quite fresh, Bill's breath came in great convulsive gasps. The truth of the matter was that both Awati and Old Pat had been in training, so to speak, from childhood. Bill, on the other hand, was a product of western civilization. Seeing his distress and refusing his suggestion that they leave him, they grasped his arms and striking a course at right angles to the path down the gully, made for a point on the steep hillside, where with their keener vision they had descried an outcropping of the main cliff above.

It was a tough scramble, but finally the three found themselves in a shallow depression beneath the overhanging rock, and at once set about fortifying the place as best they might. Bowlders were rolled to the edge of the depression and piled to form a barrier. Then having done all that was possible, they lay down in their stronghold and awaited the approach of the enemy.

Bill expressed a surmise that the head-hunters might pass their retreat in the dark. But Awati effectually dispelled this hope by telling him that these lynx-eyed hillmen would be sure to notice where their trail turned off toward the cliff and follow it.

During his wait for nightfall on the hill above the village, the lad had managed to put his automatic in order. But his companions were no better armed than the pursuing natives, and he felt convinced that, although the pigmies might be held off for a time, the outcome was inevitable death and decapitation for all three. However, with the rock slanting out above their heads, attack was possible only from the front. And although the enemy would probably get their feast of "long pig" in the end, there would be much howling and weeping among the women of the village before the three of them went into the cookpots.

The night was cold and a wind starting somewhere in the higher hills began to blow down the gulch, chilling both Bill and Awati until of sheer necessity they were forced to run back and forth behind the low wall they had just built in order to keep warm. Old Pat, who wore nothing but a loin cloth, chuckled as he squatted on his heels and watched them. Generations of naked ancestors living in these highlands, where the days are hot and the nights intensely cold, had toughened him to the discomforts of climatic change. The cold was the least of his worries. But

the wind blew away the mist and rain, and presently a full moon swam in the heavens, bathing the landscape with silver light and causing trees and bushes and bowlders to stand out in clear-cut distinctness.

During all this time the three in the fort had been able to hear the shouts of the hillmen as they came closer and closer, and shortly after the moonlight had illumined the gully, the head-hunters came in sight. Knowing their gulch as they did, it was not long before they spied the breastwork of bowlders below the cliff on the hillside, and they turned toward the little fort on a dead run.

But their shouts of joy at having brought their quarry to earth changed abruptly to howls of dismay when Bill's automatic barked. The detonation ricocheted down the gulch with alarming echoes, and off they scampered in a fright, leaving several dead comrades sprawling in the moon glare.

Although the revolver shots had surprised and terrified the head-hunters, Bill knew that they would come back again. Not so easily would these savages be deprived of their prey. He had remaining but a few rounds of ammunition. When that was gone the tribesmen would be able to overwhelm the three behind the barrier by sheer weight of numbers.

But natives are not given to analyze the future, and Old Pat was jubilant. Through Awati, Bill learned that the old fellow believed this white devil-devil to be infallible, and on the strength of it he

started a crooning chant of defiance to the foe. Bill did not think it worth while to disabuse him of his fancy, but waited, instead, for the next rush.

By and by, the tribesmen, having to some extent regained their lost courage, appeared round a turn in the gully, and after an harangue from their chief, they advanced warily up the hillside. But this time they came in open formation, each man taking cover as he found it on the uneven, sloping ground. Then as they drew close, and Bill's revolver remained silent, they dashed forward in a body.

But this was exactly what the lad had been waiting for, and as the enemy rushed the wall of stones he pistoled one man after the other. At such close range there were no misses, and the pigmies crumpled, stood undecided for a moment, then fled. Only one black reached the top of the fortification, and he was promptly dealt with by Awati and the chief. Both of these natives raised a shout of triumph, but when Bill explained to the Fly River boy that his ammunition was exhausted, Awati changed his ideas about the ultimate overcoming of the foe, and commenced a serious conversation with Old Pat.

After a five-minute powwow, he translated for Bill's benefit.

"Feller chief, him say," he declared, "bad feller black boy no likum gun—no more come back. Him sit behind rock and wait. Soon come him feller day —hot sun. Here no gotum water—no gotum grub.

Soon this place hot like fire. You, me, this feller chief go along little river down dar—go catchum drink. Maybe catchum drink, but no come back along this feller place. Bad feller black boy getum head, getum kiki (food)."

Bill noticed that the head-hunters had built fires by the side of the small stream, which bubbled down the middle of the gully, and were in all probability now cooking their morning meal. He also realized that the three of them would be held prisoners in the fort until thirst and the hot sun drove them down to the brook.

In the excitement of the past few hours Bill had forgotten that neither food nor water had passed his lips since noon of the day before, but now he remembered it with a vengeance. His throat was parched and dry, and he began to feel weak from lack of food. Down the gully a couple of hundred feet distant he could hear the trickle of the stream with tantalizing clarity. In vain he endeavored to make himself believe that this craving for water was nine-tenths imagination, that in reality he was no thirstier than before Awati had spoken. But try as he might, Bill could not turn his thoughts away from the water below them, and he knew that before many hours both he and his companions would be forced into the open by their thirst.

Somewhere he remembered reading that one might start the flow of saliva by sucking a pebble, but after

giving this a trial he spat it out in disgust. Moreover the small stone he used had not been overly clean, and grains of sand stuck to his tongue and gums increasing his irritation. While the moonlight gradually died and from black night, day sprang forth as through a parted curtain, Bill sat behind the breastwork of bowlders and vowed vengeance upon the man who had written the story about sucking the pebble.

By the time the sun was two hours high the lad came to the decision that anything was better than this overpowering thirst. He got to his feet and began to tell Awati that he was going down to the brook for a drink no matter what the outcome, when he noticed that both blacks were gazing intently at the opposite hillside. When he asked a question, Awati placed a finger on his lips and pointed across the gully.

At first Bill could make out nothing but the rocks and bushes and the red clay of the cliffs; but presently he saw a small black figure glide from behind a bowlder to a bush several yards nearer the stream.

"Chief say feller black boy there belong along him," whispered Awati.

Then, before Bill fully realized what was happening, Old Pat opened his mouth and from it issued the raucous cry of a jungle fowl immediately to be answered from the other side of the gully.

"You, me, chief go along drink now," declared Awati, moistening dry lips with a drier tongue. "Go catchum feller head maybe—right now." Suiting

action to his words, he leaped over the breastwork and, followed closely by Billy and Old Pat, raced for the stream.

The hillmen, expecting some such rush, had been watching, and with loud shouts they swooped down the brookside toward the running men. What they had not counted upon was a flank attack by Old Pat's tribesmen. To their astonishment and rage they found themselves beset on the left by a yelling band of strangers, pigmies like themselves, who rushed at them with spears and clubs, and upon coming to blows, used their weapons with deadly effect. Taken unawares and believing themselves overwhelmed, the men, who had dragged their prisoners up this narrow valley the day before, now turned tail and beat a swift retreat for their village.

As soon as Bill saw that the enemy was in full flight he dropped to the brookside, as did his fellow defenders of the breastwork. But long before he had drunk his fill, Awati jerked him roughly to his feet.

"Too much feller drink bad," announced the black. "Big debil-debil come along belly—no can run—no come home along feller lake. Boss, you come along Awati—takum feller head."

But the gruesome task of removing the heads of the fallen did not appeal to Bill. While Awati and the tribesmen satisfied their desire for these ghastly trophies, he busied himself by taking a quick bath

in the stream. The pigmies, who were experts at their favorite pastime, finished before he did, but he set off with them down the gully toward the lowlands and struggled into his shirt as he walked.

He was surprised to see that a meager dozen of Old Pat's tribesmen had joined them. When the little men had appeared as though by magic from the hillside, Bill would have sworn there were double that number. Now as the party fell into a swinging trot, the bloody heads dangling by the hair from their girdles, he realized that the danger was not yet over. The hillmen of the valley village had undoubtedly made the same mistake as to the number of the newcomers, and as soon as their scouts brought in word of the truth, the tribe would hasten after the little band and wipe them out at the first possible moment. Obviously, safety lay in flight alone; so catching his second wind, Bill hastened on down the gully.

Old Pat who was leading, and who seemed none the worse for his trying experiences of the past twenty-four hours, piloted them out of the gulch and across the wide plain in a straight line toward the river. This was the track Bill had followed the day before. But instead of following the river in the direction the enemy would naturally expect him to go, the wise old native walked into the water and swimming to the farther side, splashed upstream through the shallows, and left no telltale footprints

for his foes to follow. After a mile or more of wading, the party struck again into the jungle.

It was mid-afternoon by the time the weary and footsore band reached the village by the lake. Amid joyous shouts of welcome, they sat down to a meal which Bill, for one, tired as he was, enjoyed as he had never enjoyed food before. Then, when they had eaten their fill, Awati and he went over to their hut, and five minutes later both were fast asleep.

It was two hours after sunup next morning, although it seemed to Billy that he had hardly closed his eyes, when he was awakened by somebody gently shaking him. Looking up he saw Awati kneeling beside his rough couch, and across a wood fire which smoldered in the center of the hut sending slender wisps of smoke toward the venthole in the thatch, stood Old Pat and two of his henchmen.

Even before Awati translated the chief's words, Bill knew that something was amiss. Old Pat registered great excitement and the two tribesmen at his back jabbered to each other in an undertone.

For some minutes the chief talked to Awati. Then the Fly River boy turned toward his master and the substance of his information was this:

As soon as the party had arrived at the lake village the afternoon before, Old Pat had sent off several of his younger warriors on a scouting expedition toward the higher hills. After the battle of the gully, where the enemy had been put to rout and many

heads taken, he anticipated a counterattack and, wily old savage that he was, he had taken care that his own village should not be surprised. One of these scouts had just returned. He reported that a body of hillmen had indeed followed the fugitives the day before, but had lost the track at the river. They had therefore retraced their steps over the plain and up the gully to the village where a council of war had taken place. The scouts had followed then along Bill's path on the hillcrest and dropping down the cliff had got close to the village in the dark. From their hiding-place they learned that runners had been sent off from the council to other of the mountain villages and that these men bore instruction to bring back emissaries with them. The hill villagers, Awati explained, occasionally banded together to fight a common enemy.

Upon the return of the runners with certain of the hill-chiefs, one of Old Pat's scouts had crawled even nearer to the council circle, quite close enough to overhear the powwow. He now declared that the chiefs after swearing friendship had decided to unite forces and to march upon the village by the lake.

Old Pat, so Awati said, declared that his village must be evacuated immediately. The tribe, he added, would hide in the swamps below until these hillmen went home again. Of course if the white devil-devil, who had come in the flying monster and to whom he owed his life, would use his puripuri (magic)

against these cursed invaders, things might be arranged otherwise. But the tabu used must be a very strong one, for the hill-pigmies were many, whereas his own tribe were few, and resistance out of the question.

"Ask him how long he thinks it will be before the hillmen are able to get the clans together and march down here," Bill said.

"Chief say time feller sun stop along to-morrow," replied Awati, after questioning Old Pat.

"If the tribe takes to the swamps, we will be made to go along with them, I suppose," remarked Bill. "And those confounded chaps from the hills will burn the plane along with the village. Do you think these little men can be counted upon to make a stand here, if you tell Old Pat that I will work a tabu, Awati?"

"Awati think yes," replied that gentleman. "Black boy here no like along him feller village burn. But him no like lose him feller head—no like make um long-pig for bad feller black boy."

"That's all right then," declared Bill. "We'll do our level best to keep out of the cookpots, never fear. And we've got a day and a night to prepare for those hillmen. By that time we ought to be able to put the place in a fair state of defense. You tell the chief to do as I say and I'll plant an A1 tabu upon every man who comes to fight us. But tell him also that he and his people are to place themselves

absolutely under our orders or the tabu won't work for sour apples."

This last reference to a fruit Awati had never seen or even heard of was a bit beyond his reach, but he showed his white teeth in a wide grin and started in to translate.

When he stopped talking, the old chief nodded his comprehension and, walking round the fire, grasped Bill's hand and placed it upon his woolly head, thereby renouncing the leadership of the tribe. Henceforth, Bill's word would be law within the village, and woe betide the transgressor.

Those were not Awati's exact words when he explained the substance of this ceremonial, but Bill gleaned that meaning from the tangle of words the Kiwai floundered in at the time. Billy, of course, was not a trained tactician, but a lad of fourteen is almost a man and he had often discussed with his uncle ways and means of fortifying positions of danger. He knew now that the tribe's safety, and that of Awati and himself, lay in his own hands, and wasting no more precious time in talk, he set about the matter of their defense.

With Awati, Old Pat and half a dozen warriors, he made a tour of the village and its outskirts. The woodland glen in which the settlement lay, except where it ran down to the shore of the lake, was completely surrounded by the jungle. After a general survey of the place, Bill ordered that the huts

near the edge of the trees be cut down. Then with a stick he drew a line paralleling the forest some twenty yards distant. This started at the water's edge, and running entirely round the village ended again at the lake.

"Tell them, Awati," he directed, "that everything outside this line in the way of huts must be pulled down. As soon as they get finished with that, I want the men to start digging a trench along this line—a fairly deep trench. They should heap the dirt on the village side of the ditch, and the women and children must bring more dirt from within the village until they raise a mound as high as the chief's head. When that is done everybody must get busy cutting thorn bushes, for we are going to build a thick hedge or fence on top of the mound behind the trench. I also want some of the men to cut rollers so that the 'Swallow' can be dragged onto that little rise in the middle of the village. Ask the chief if he thinks he can get all this down before those hill fellows show up."

Awati, after outlining the plans to Old Pat, put Bill's question to him and was answered in the affirmative.

"Well then," said Bill, "so far as I can see, there's nothing to do but to get busy, and get busy on the jump."

The inspection party had returned to where the seaplane lay beached on the lake's shore, when a

sharp call from Old Pat brought every man, woman and child to the spot on the run. Then for a time the little man talked to his people, who as they gradually grasped the significance of his words showed their entire satisfaction by broad grins and chuckles. He finished by giving them Bill's orders and after they had been dismissed, one and all started to work with a will.

Houses beyond the line of fortification were razed, and the débris used to help build the mound behind the trench. The work of digging, however, went infinitely more slowly than Billy wished and he saw that it would become a long job at best. Not that the pigmies slacked, but in a land where the steel pick and shovel are unknown, and their only approximate counterparts flat stakes whose pointed ends have been hardened by fire, the digging of a long, deep trench is a slow and arduous labor.

The lad, after seeing that the natives had got his ideas and were well at work, left the fortifications to the supervision of Awati and the chief. He busied himself superintending the villagers, who by this time had cut the rollers upon which the "Swallow" was to be pulled up to the little knoll in the middle of the settlement. Strangely enough, Bill had the greatest trouble in making his assistants understand that they would come to no harm from touching the plane. They seemed to think that this flying devil-devil was asleep and did not care to awake him to

more demonstrations of his godhead. Eventually Awati and the chief had to be called, and after the tribesmen had seen Old Pat lay his hands upon the hull, they lost their fear and set to work with a will.

By afternoon, the seaplane had been pushed and shoved into position, and with Awati's help, Bill went about removing the Lewis gun from the fore cockpit.

At sundown Bill called a half hour's halt. The workers came trooping in to the cook fires, torches were lighted and a number of the women who had been told off for the purpose served the workers with food and drink.

With the nightfall, the worrying swarms of mosquitoes again made their appearance. The natives with their leather-like skins minded them not at all and were vastly amused and surprised that the white devil-devil should be made so uncomfortable by the stinging insects. In vain Billy brushed these pests from his face and neck. He knew that if the brutes were allowed to have their will, by morning he would not be able to see at all. Suddenly a happy thought struck him. He ran over to the plane and fishing his flying helmet and goggles out of a locker, he put them on. Below these he tucked in a handkerchief and thereby completely covered his head, face and neck. Once more life became livable.

Some time later, the machine gun was set up on the middle of the plane's upper wing section. This point of vantage overlooked the whole village and its

growing defenses. Of course in its present position the gun would also become a splendid target for arrows of the invaders; so to defend it, a low, circular bulwark was put up, completely surrounding the Lewis and its gunner.

All this took time, and Bill was amazed upon looking at his wrist watch to see that it lacked but two hours before daybreak. Hurriedly, he clambered down from the "Swallow" and began an inspection of the outer line of defense. What was his dismay to find that although the trench had been dug and the mound nearly finished, the pigmies were only beginning to cut the thorn bushes which were to form the thick hedge on top. He therefore sought out Awati and the chief.

"Ask Old Pat," he said to his follower, "how long he figures it will take the men to cut those bushes and get them placed in position."

For some minutes Awati conferred with the pigmy chief.

"Him say time sun stop along so high." Awati raised his arm to angle signifying about eleven in the morning.

"Holy Smoke!" ejaculated Bill, "and he expects those other chaps by daylight?"

"Him say Massa Bill put number one big tabu in bush before bad feller black boy close up come. What time feller black boy stop along here, all ready maybe—maybe no. Awati no can say—him think

you, me, all feller village, how you say—in the soup."

"It sure looks as if we would get there in the end," said Bill, without enthusiasm. "In the meantime tell them to work all they know how—we can't do better than our best, that's a cert."

Chapter XIV

THE ADVANCE OF THE HILLMEN

MORNING broke over the village with every man, woman and child working like beavers, rooting up or cutting down thorn bushes. From the forest this shrubbery was carried over to the mound behind the wide and deep ditch where the bushes were tied together with pandanus fibers and then lashed to stakes which had been driven deep into the earth of the mound. The tribesmen thoroughly understood this form of defense, which, when completed, would form a protective barrier about the village more difficult for an enemy to surmount than the highest wall. But for all their diligence and applied knowledge, the pigmies progressed slowly with the work. The distance to be fenced was long and their stone age tools, for digging and cutting, primitive in the extreme.

During the night, Bill in rummaging through the "Swallow's" lockers came across a dozen trade knives and hatchets. These he immediately gave to Old Pat who parceled them out to his principal warriors. The tribesmen were delighted with the gift. Never before had they owned steel weapons of any kind, and the superiority of such arms, over their own

knives and hatchets of stone, needed no explaining. Bill's present naturally facilitated the cutting of the thorn bushes, but he realized that should their foes appear within the next couple of hours, every person within the partly finished enclosure would eventually find an end in the cookpots of the hillmen. Throughout the night scouts had been posted in the jungle, but as yet they had brought in no word of the enemy.

An hour later one of the young men came running in from the forest to say that a large body of the foe could be seen approaching in the swamplands below. The hillmen had made a wide detour so as to reach the village from a totally different direction than that from which they would naturally be expected. It spoke well for Old Pat's shrewdness that his scouts had ringed the community, and through Awati, Bill complimented him upon it.

The old man shot him a pleased grin and suggested that the white devil-devil should go with him to catch a glimpse of the enemy. So they left Awati in charge of the unfinished building operations and went back with the scout to his post of observation, a great spur of rock which jutted out from the hillside below the village half a mile away.

Upon reaching this point, Bill saw that the rock commanded a fine view of both the lower foothills and the seemingly endless swamps of mangrove beyond. At first, even through the field glasses he had brought along, he could see nothing more than

the landscape, but suddenly the old chief raised a hand and pointed. Far below, so distant that though magnified by the lenses the trees were barely discernible from their darker green background of swamp, he made out a black dot. Another came into view, following fast upon the heels of the first, then another and yet another. The hillmen, in Indian file, were crossing an open space in the swamp, and there must have been two hundred of them.

Bill had not counted upon such an army. That Old Pat and his scout sensed the seriousness of the situation was apparent by their excited jabbering and gestures. The chief, a pathetic little figure in his anxiety, caught Billy's hand as he had done in the hut the day before, and drew it down upon his woolly head. More plainly than words, the lad understood that although Old Pat believed the situation to be hopeless, he placed himself and his people in the care of this white man whom he believed to be a god or a devil or both. Touched by such confidence, Bill patted the old native's shoulder. Then after gazing for some minutes in the direction of the disappearing hillmen, the two left the outpost and started back for the village.

Bill had not expected that the hill pigmies would be able to raise a force of more than fifty or at the most sixty warriors. And now that he knew he had at least four times that number to contend with, the only light in his melancholy was the knowledge that

it would take the foe a couple of hours longer to reach the village. The question uppermost in his mind was how best to utilize the extra time, and pondering on this problem he walked swiftly back through the forest, his guide, the old chief, pattering on ahead.

He knew now that there would be time and to spare to finish the barrier surrounding the settlement. Their greatest danger lay in the close proximity of the forest; for, hidden by a screen of the trees' dense foliage, the enemy could shoot their poisoned arrows into the village without much danger of being driven off short of a sortie; and a sortie from the village against such odds was not to be thought of. The invading savages, Bill told himself, were inured to this kind of warfare and would without doubt grasp every advantage offered. In a mob of natives storming the barrier, the machine gun, the two rifles and pair of revolvers, his armory of firearms, would work havoc with the enemy. But what if the hillmen decided to take to the trees and remained there? Ammunition would be but wasted against a foe hidden behind the living green, and gradually the poisoned darts of the invaders would decimate the garrison. Then a quick rush from the jungle would come, and so far as he and his friends were concerned, all would soon be over. With proper arms, a body of villagers, if given time, might hew

down these to a distance beyond the shooting range of darts and arrows, but with only stone axes to work with, such a plan was out of the question. Fire of course might prove of some aid, but green foliage burns slowly, and unless brought in direct contact with excessive heat, is almost impossible to ignite.

Heartily did Bill bemoan his lack of foresight in not rearing the barrier at twice or even three times the distance away from the forest. But in order to do that, practically all the houses would have had to come down, and the tribe might just as well have taken to the swamps and permitted the place to be burned.

But never one to cry over spilled milk, the lad wasted no more thought on what he might have done. During the remainder of the walk back he turned his active mind toward solving this problem of the trees; a problem which he knew must be solved were he and the inhabitants of the village to remain alive.

Passing out of the forest and across the open space between it and the defenses, he hailed Awati who was superintending the finishing of that structure. Loopholes had been painstakingly cut in the thick barrier of thorn bushes and Bill now directed that stakes be sharpened in the fires and firmly driven into the bottom of the trench below. These were to be planted in such a manner that the sharpened points would stick up about two feet above ground. The

stakes, he further ordered, were to be screened from the enemy by small branches and vines flung down upon them.

After seeing that his orders were being carried out, Bill climbed the breastwork by one of the ladders being used by the workers and found to his satisfaction that the women and children with the defenses were busy heating large stones and boiling water against the arrival of their foes.

Making his way to the middle of the settlement, he climbed aboard the "Swallow" and up to his little fortress which housed the Lewis gun. There, with the village and its defenses below him, he studied the wall of trees and their hanging vines and creepers which circled the village beyond the barrier.

It was a lovely morning, clear and just cool enough to be pleasant, a gratifying change from the sticky heat of the Fly River and its encompassing swamps. Not a cloud flecked the sky, not a breath of wind stirred the massed foliage of the jungle. Below him he could see the pigmies working hard under the direction of Awati and their chief. Too tired to chatter, they still toiled on, putting an astonishing amount of vim and vitality into their labors—for these little black men and women had been at it almost steadily for nearly twenty-four hours. Then of a sudden a thought came to Bill, and he gave a wild war whoop of delight which brought every villager to his toes.

"Awati!" he shouted. "Come over here at once!

Bring Old Pat and twenty men with you—on the run!"

The Kiwai, with the chief and his men got over the barrier and up to the plane before Bill could clamber to the ground.

"What for Massa Bill stop along big feller noise?" Awati panted. "He think bad feller nigger come along bush—but no see along him."

"Listen!" commanded Bill, and went on to explain the danger of the trees. "We are going to burn them," he added in conclusion.

"Trees green—fire no can burn," promptly responded Awati. "No can do, Massa Bill. Feller black boy come along tree sure. Shoot arrow along here. Bad—very bad—but Boss no can do."

"Yes, can do!" contradicted Bill quite flatly. "The 'Swallow's' tanks are pretty near full of gasoline. Tell the chief to have these men collect bundles of that spongy fiber from the thatch of the cottages. I don't suppose there is a square inch of cloth in the whole village. The men are then going to climb trees ten or fifteen yards apart at the edge of the jungle; with them they will take bundles of the thatch which we will first soak in gasoline. Gasoline burns with a very hot flame. But first of all, I'll dole out matches to the gang, after I show the chaps how to use them. Tell the men, Awati, that when they get up to the smaller branches of those trees with their soaking bundles, they must wedge the stuff in

tightly among the masses of vine and then strike the match. Caution them to take care they don't burn themselves doing it. That thatch, wet with gasoline, will blaze up like dry powder in a pan once it is lighted. Do you understand everything I have told you?"

"Awati, him do."

"All right then, translate what I have just said to Old Pat and the rest, and tell them to get busy or those hillmen will be here before we can get the forest burning."

Awati turned to the chief, and as he went on with his instructions, Bill saw the pigmies smile and grunt and nod with appreciation. Then in a series of clicks and low, sharp gutturals, Old Pat gave his orders, and things began to happen.

Bales of thatch were hastily gathered and piled up in a heap by the plane. Bill and Awati then explained away the mystery of the match to the delighted, though somewhat awed, villagers. Next a demonstration was made to show them how to ignite the bundles after the thatch had been dipped in gasoline. Bill found that upon placing a lighted match in the near proximity of the gas that the whole mass flared up almost before he could draw his hand away.

A line of the men was formed. Bill reached for the bundles, dipped them in a gas tank, passed them on to Awati, who in turn handed the bundles to the waiting men. As each native received his dripping

fagot he raced for the barrier and swarming over it by ladders left for that purpose, sped away toward the belt of forest giants beyond the open space.

In less than ten minutes from the time Bill dipped the last fagot, fires broke out in the tree tops and among the vines which hung from the branches.

Bill climbed up to his post beside the Lewis again. With anxious eyes he watched these spots of flame as all the village was watching them. But soon he saw that his fears were groundless. The fires fanned by a gentle breeze, which, as though sent by the hand of Providence, had sprung up a few minutes before, sputtered at first, then spread, and in less time than it takes in the telling, the edge of the jungle was metamorphosed into a raging furnace.

For a time the heat of the fire became almost unbearable in the village, but as the flames ate their way inward this became less noticeable. And presently where the forest green had lived, a smoking wilderness of charred stumps and naked tree trunks lay smoldering.

But soon a dense cloud of smoke settled down upon the little community and the air within the barrier became almost unbreathable. With one accord the entire population, Bill and Awati included, gravitated to the lake front. Here they were at a greater distance from the burning trees, and as what wind there was blew from across the water, they were in a way protected from the stinging, choking fumes.

It looked to Bill as if he had set half of New Guinea afire. But he knew that in a land where it rains every day his fire would shortly be quenched by a tropical downpour. And sure enough, within an hour black clouds banked the horizon and in a few minutes rain in a streaming torrent was deluging the landscape.

Now that the smoke had been driven away it could be seen that the gasoline had done its work well. For over half a mile on all sides of the village, except where it bordered the lake, a desert of smoking stumps and ashes lay exposed, in which no human being could possibly conceal himself.

With the abatement of the forest fire the village outposts began to return. They reported bands of the hillmen, aggregating about two hundred tribesmen, hard on their heels.

All ladders were immediately pulled inside the fortifications and every villager took up his or her allotted place. Then half an hour later, the vanguard of the hillmen appeared, and a few moments afterward these figures were followed by five pigmies, who from their gorgeous feathered headdresses, Bill knew to be chiefs. These gentry, keeping well out of bow shot, commenced to reconnoiter the position.

That the enemy chiefs were surprised by the trench and thorn bush barrier upon the high mound was plainly evident. They shook their spears at the

village and imprecations were hurled from savage throats.

With the knowledge that one leader is worth many men, Bill trained the Lewis upon the chiefs and commenced firing. The battle had begun.

Chapter XV

THE BATTLE OF THE PIGMIES

NO small part of Bill's ground work aboard the Naval Air Station at Hampton Roads had been his study of the principles of aerial ordnance, and now that training served him in good stead.

Zip, zip, zip! The machine gun sprayed the hostile chiefs with a hailstorm of lead, and three of the five hillmen dropped in their tracks. The other two, stunned for the moment by this unknown and mysterious agent of death, looked wildly about, then darted for the jungle, like a pair of weasels into cover, separating as they ran.

Billy maneuvered the Lewis so that it swung from side to side and was delighted to see another pigmy fall just as the second gained the forest and was lost to sight within its dark green depths. Ammunition being none too plentiful, Bill stopped firing. It was no part of his plan to rake the jungle for enemies who, for all he knew, might be bivouacked half a mile away.

The thought of killing men had always been repellent to the lad, but strangely enough he felt no remorse at having been the means of bringing death to these hillmen, nor would he feel compunction in re-

peating the performance. These head-hunters were cannibals, and it was kill or be killed—and undoubtedly eaten—should they succeed in carrying the village.

At this new demonstration of their white devil-devil's power of tabu, Old Pat and his tribe became wild with excitement. They shouted themselves hoarse, at the same time shaking their weapons at the jungle and proclaiming Billy the greatest of gods and devils. Springing high in the air, they screeched and yelled until Bill called down to Awati and suggested they save their wind, for the rush on the barrier sure to come. Although they obeyed and stopped their screaming, the little men were in a seventh heaven of delight and hugged one another in their glee. For them the foe was as good as vanquished, but soon they were to learn otherwise.

In the meantime, Bill, who was anything but sanguine, held a consultation with Awati regarding the advisability of initiating Old Pat and two of his principal followers into the mysteries of the extra rifle and brace of automatic revolvers. With five pieces of ordnance at their command, no one but Awati and he knew how to use them. But Bill might have spared himself the pains, for when the Kiwai boy spoke to the pigmies about it they absolutely refused to have anything to do with the guns. The superstitious reverence with which the little men regarded these death-dealing weapons was surprising

to the lad. The tribesmen had seen him use the rifle in shooting the crane shortly after he landed the "Swallow" on the lake the day of their arrival, and the memory of that, plus what had just happened with the machine gun, was quite sufficient.

Bill knew that in the short space of time, he now felt sure, remained before the advance of the hillmen on the village, little or nothing could be done to make marksmen of the pigmies; still, he had hoped that they might be able to do considerable damage with the firearms when the enemy rushed the barrier. Their own weapons, bows and arrows, blowpipes, stone-tipped spears, clubs, axes and stone knives would prove of little service except at close quarters.

Awati spoke up after a somewhat lengthy argument with Old Pat.

"Chief say," he translated, "him no like along feller gun. Say feller gun A1 white devil-devil puripuri. Say Massa Bill and Awati big feller devil-devil. Devil-devil can do—little feller black boy no can do."

And so Billy had to let it go at that.

The warriors of the village had taken their places on the top of the mound behind the thorn bushes, while the women and older children waited just below. These busied themselves with gourds of boiling water and red hot stones, which they kept in readiness to pass up to the men at a moment's notice.

A number of other women stood beside the "Swal-

low" where fagots of thatch, like those with which the young men had set the forest afire, were piled. At the first advance of the enemy, two women, who had been told off for this duty, were to dip the fagots in gasoline, and the others were to rush them to the firing line where the warriors would ignite the soaking bundles and toss them down upon the heads of the foe.

Awati's place was on the mound, and there he waited impatiently with his rifle and automatic, ready to lead the defense and to lend a hand at whatever point he might be most needed.

Bill, perched beside the machine gun on the seaplane's upper wing, his other arms close by, had a perfect view of the whole village and the terrain beyond. Here he could see the villagers squatting behind the thorn fence, sharpening the blades of the steel knives and hatchets he had given them on the leather-like soles of their feet. The rain had stopped, not a leaf stirred in the jungle; and no sound came up to him except the clicking chatter of the tribe and the occasional cry of a bird in the bush.

At last, after they had been waiting for over an hour, the foe burst forth from cover. Bill immediately got busy with the Lewis again. Round after round he fired into the midst of the advancing pigmies, who rushed forward with no attempt at formation, shouting hoarse battle cries and shooting their arrows as they came. But before they had covered a

quarter of the distance to the trench they realized their mistake and spread out all over the burned space.

Now their advance became slower, but at the same time more effectual. Taking advantage of every naked tree trunk or charred stump, the hillmen darted from cover to cover, thereby seriously diminishing the deadlines of the machine gun bullets. Bill stopped firing. He saw that he was only wasting precious ammunition, so picking up the rifle that lay beside him, he emulated Awati who was picking off individual hillmen rather than trying to slaughter them *en masse.*

During this time the warriors of the village had not been idle. They kept up a continuous fusillade of darts and arrows through the loopholes in the fence, which although doing little actual damage to the foe, caused the enemy head-hunters to expose themselves no more than was necessary and retarded their advance. But at the breaking off of Bill's machine gun fire, the hillmen took heart once more and, leaping from their places of partial concealment, dashed onward at the trench.

Although the slaughter was severe during this second charge, it did not halt the foe. These savages were brave men. They rushed steadily on, many dropping by the way, but others always taking their places, until they came to the trench. Here, for the fraction of a second, those in the van halted, only to

be pushed over the edge by the crowd behind. Many were thereby sent sprawling on to the sharpened stakes hidden by the vines and branches at the bottom of the ditch.

Then it was that the villagers began their deadly work. Red hot stones, boiling water, poisoned arrows, and flaming bundles of thatch were hurled over the thorn fence and down upon the unfortunates endeavoring to scale the barrier. The shrieks of the wounded and the cries of the poor wretches impaled on the stakes became bloodcurdling.

But it was not long before numbers of these agile pigmies were swarming up the mound and hacking at the thorn bushes with their stone axes. Others climbed on the shoulders of their comrades and endeavored to hurl themselves over the high hedge. But now the long spears and knives of the villagers came into play, and Bill found no fault with the way they used them. They thrust through the loopholes, slashing and stabbing at the faces of their foes as they appeared above the barrier, betimes shrieking out insults and their harsh battle cries.

Bill, on the upper wing of the plane, busied himself with his express rifle picking off hillmen who tried to scale the thorn bushes. Awati about this time left the fortifications, realizing he could command a greater area, and thereby do more damage with his gun, from the top of the seaplane, and in a little while he was seated beside his master, pumping away

at the enemy with every evidence of entire satisfaction.

Few of the hillmen were able to leap the barrier, and these, outnumbered by the villagers, were stabbed or clubbed and then hurled below for the women to finish.

For another five minutes the enemy tried in vain to carry the defenses. But human flesh and blood could not long stand such treatment, and suddenly, with one accord, all who were able turned tail and streaked for the shelter of the jungle.

Bill was afraid that the villagers, spurred to greater slaughter by the repulse, might follow. But he need have harbored no fears on this score. The little men realized the inferiority of their numbers, when it came to fighting in the open, and contented themselves by hurling insults at their retreating foes and by waving their weapons in an ecstasy of triumph.

After dark, as the hillmen did not again make their appearance, Bill, knowing the danger of infection, ordered that the bodies of the fallen be buried in a ditch beyond the barrier. Then the trench below that fortification was to be cleared and restaked, and any damage done the thorn fence to be repaired.

But before the burying party left the village, the whole tribe, headed by Old Pat, came to Bill's hut and called them forth from the meal they were eating.

When the two appeared in the low doorway they

were met with a great shout, and then the old chief made them a lengthy oration. Awati translated it somewhat in this manner.

"Chief say Massa Bill A1 big feller white devil-devil. Him say Massa Bill, Awati stop along village all time. Me think not so good—what?"

Billy smiled at his boy's blue-penciling powers. "We'll have to leave that to the future, Awati," he remarked. "But I don't think the old fellow is likely to get his wish—not if I can help it, anyway. Tell him I appreciate his compliments and this demonstration in our honor. But tell him, too, that the sooner those dead men are put under ground the better it will be for all of us. Thank goodness our men used poisoned arrows. I'd hate to have the victory topped off with one of those man-eating feasts these fellows are so fond of."

The losses of the villagers were very small indeed. Five only had been killed. Some ten or a dozen had received wounds of a more or less serious nature, and these Bill did his best to treat with a first aid kit from the "Swallow" as soon as the fighting had ended. The pigmies were tough, hardy savages, and the lad felt confident their hurts would quickly respond to his ministrations. Neither he nor Awati had received a scratch, although a war arrow had torn a jagged rent in the shoulder of Bill's shirt.

After finishing their meal in the hut, he and Awati went out to the barrier and supervised the restaking

of the trench. The villagers had just completed this labor when the gravediggers returned. And a more horrible and disgusting sight the lad had never seen, for each native carried with him two or more freshly severed human heads. Knowing the gruesome custom of New Guinea, he held his peace, content for the time that his own head still rested securely upon his shoulders.

Before he turned in, Bill waited for the return of the scouts who had been sent after the enemy. When they came back from their reconnoiter, they reported that the hillmen were camped in the forest about a mile away. Sentries were then placed and Bill went back to the hut with Awati. Both had taken no rest during the past twenty-four hours and were half dead with fatigue and from lack of sleep. The villagers, to the contrary, made no pretense of seeking their huts, and from the numbers of small fires that sprang up all over the settlement shortly after the burying party put in an appearance, Bill knew that his pigmy friends would be busy curing their grisly battle trophies half the night. Not being interested in this form of amusement, he dropped down on his bed of grasses, and bidding his henchman good-night, was soon off to the land of Nod.

Chapter XVI

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE LAKE

BILL awoke with a start, stretched his cramped limbs and sat up. Awati was bending over the fire in the middle of the hut, cooking. Lazily the lad watched the flame rise and flicker and the smoke go creeping upward to disappear at last through the square opening in the thatch. Bill was hungry and said so.

"We belong heap feller good dinner," declaimed the black, grinning and pointing to the meal. "Belong soup, yam, pork and bean, biscuit Awati, him think Massa Bill stop along A1 big feller sleep."

"What time is it, anyway?"

"Belong to-morrow afternoon."

"Glory! I must have slept the clock around."

"You sure did," returned Awati, who was quick to catch and retain slang phrases let drop by his master. "Talk mouthful along that time, Sar."

Bill stretched luxuriously and, moving over to the fire, was served with a gourd of soup.

"This is an A1 good feller dinner, all right," he announced, sipping the hot broth. "What's the news? Those hillmen haven't come back for more, I take it, or you'd have waked me up sooner."

"Hillman no do along nothing, Sar. Keep along feller camp in bush—eat, sleep, maybe stop along fight some more soon—who know?"

Bill questioned Awati further and learned that the scouts sent out by the chief reported the enemy quiet. They also brought in word that the pigmy forces had been augmented by a band of fifty more tribesmen from the higher hills and that they had built their camp in a series of bivouacs a hundred yards behind the forest's edge. These extended through the jungle down to the lake shore on both sides of the village, completely surrounding it upon the land side. It looked at first glance as if they might be preparing to start a siege and starve the villagers into submission. But having learned by this time something of the savages' Stone Age methods of warfare, Bill came to believe that, after the hillmen had eaten and rested sufficiently, they would develop some other method of attack, and that from an absolutely unexpected quarter.

These surmises proved well founded. On the morning of the second day numbers of the enemy were seen to come down to the shore at the farther end of the lake dragging tree trunks with them. These they straightway floated and built into rafts by the simple expedient of lopping off the branches and binding the logs together with creepers and pandanus fibers.

As each raft was completed, the watchers in the

village saw the hillmen moor it to a stake or bush on the lake's brim, and directly afterward piles of saplings were carried aboard and the savages started to raise a high breastwork at one end of the raft.

Bill studied these preparations with keen interest through his field glasses, and when night came he saw from the flickering flames of torches that the work still kept up. The object of this raft building was of course plain to him. The foe was getting ready for a concentrated attack on the village by water in the morning. Having been mowed down by Bill's machine gun bullets when making their assault on the thorn fence from the forest, the hillmen had decided to place themselves under cover while next on the advance.

Bill walked back to his hut where Awati was dozing, and sitting down by the fire thought over the situation. Then slowly the germ of an idea formed in his mind.

For an hour he sat there gradually working out the details. Eventually he got to his feet and going over to the black boy, aroused him.

A ten-minute conversation sufficed to make Awati cognizant of the plan; and, delighted with the chance of both downing the hillmen once and for all, and at the same time securing their own escape from the village, the Kiwai left the hut in search of Old Pat.

When he returned, bringing the chief with him, Billy, whose word had become law to the community,

began a partial explanation through the medium of Awati.

"Tell him," declared the lad, "that unless I am allowed to work my puripuri (magic) on these hill-fellows and do it in my own way, the tabu won't work, and the village is sure to be taken in the morning. The chief has seen for himself the high walls of saplings those chaps are putting up on the front end of each raft. With the walls as a protection, they will be able to push right up to the barrier on the lake front without the loss of a single man. Our arrows and bullets can do little or no harm to men hidden behind tree trunks. Then, when the rafts reach the village, they will run ladders from their breastworks across the top of our thorn fence, and their men will come trooping over. We shall kill a lot of them, of course. But tell Old Pat that in the end we are bound to lose the village, and our lives. And ask him too, how he proposes to stop the hillmen from doing just that?"

Awati translated this, and after the chief had clicked back a reply, he spoke again to his master.

"Chief say Massa Bill make along big feller puripuri—make along jolly well like, Sar. Him say no can do nothing. Massa Bill stop along make um tabu right now quick."

"Good enough!" declared Bill. "Now tell the old chap what I told you to tell him of our plan."

As his henchman talked, Bill could see the old man

frown. But before the Kiwai boy got through with his instructions, a smile lit up the pigmy's ugly face, and his sharpened teeth showed in a grin which almost met his ears.

"Chief say can do," remarked Awati presently. "Me now bin tell feller chief him no stop along you say, Sar, you bin make along puripuri bad for chief and all village. You bin send chief and every one along hot feller heaven quick-quick."

Awati had received missionary training back at Daru, and Bill could not hide a smile at the way this black boy had profited by his instruction. He wondered, too, how much and how little the meaning of his words were changed when Awati acted the part of interpreter.

Before arriving in New Guinea, Bill thought it would be a speedy and simple matter to learn many of the native languages and dialects. All the books of adventure he had read declared that the hero invariably began to pick up words of whatever savage tribe he might be thrown with on the first day or two of his stay with them. Within a week this hero of fiction was holding long conversations, and, like as not, making love to the chief's daughter with surprising linguistic proficiency. The author sometimes explained that primitive languages contained few words and that it was no trick to learn all there was to know in a short space of time. Bill had not really believed such yarns, and now he knew them to be untrue.

Incidentally he thanked heaven that Awati was able to understand the pigmy lingo.

"All right, then, Awati," he said, after the native had finished giving further instructions to Old Pat. "Have the chief call off a bunch of men from their head cooking so that they can help us run the 'Swallow' down to the water."

Awati told Old Pat his devil-devil wishes. The little man nodded in grave concurrence and at once left the hut.

Shortly afterward, Bill and Awati followed him, and presently the seaplane was being started on its slow roller-coast down to the lake front. While this was going on under Bill's supervision, Awati saw to the cutting of a section of the barrier by the lake-side. When the time came, this was to be removed so that the plane could be pushed through the gap and floated. And it was arranged in such wise that the removable section could be fitted back into place once the "Swallow" was on the water.

Meanwhile, Bill with Old Pat's help, dismantled the Lewis gun and bringing it down from its position on the upper wing section, set it up in its old place in the fore cockpit.

But two hours of daylight were left by the time these jobs were finished, but Bill would not stop until he had given the whole plane, together with its motor, a thorough overhauling. In the work he planned for the morrow, he could not afford to take chances. His

freedom and that of Awati, to say nothing of the salvation of the lake village, depended upon the "Swallow" and her ability to function. Although he would have given much for rest and sleep, he kept on at the work until it was finished to his satisfaction and everything on the plane was running smoothly once more.

By the time the seaplane was made shipshape, Awati and his gang had the section of the barrier ready for removal. Satisfying himself of this, Bill gave orders that he be called at the first sign of movement among their enemies and went back to his hut to snatch what sleep he might before the coming battle. His principal worry was lack of gasoline. So much had been used in soaking the bundles of thatch, both to start the jungle fire and as fireballs to hurl against the enemy, that he found, were he and Awati really able to get clear away, it was an even break they would run out of gas before the expedition aboard the *Dorothy* could be located.

But Bill was an optimistic lad; moreover, he was deadly tired, and he had not been long on his comfortable bed of dried grasses when his regular breathing told that he had forgotten his troubles in sleep.

He awoke to feel Awati's hand pressing his shoulder, and sprang up at once. The black boy told him that it was about an hour after daybreak and that the hillmen were getting the rafts under way at the other end of the lake. Stopping just long enough to

take a hurried bite or two, of the breakfast Awati had waiting, he left the hut, his henchman at his side, and hurried down to the thorn fence at the water-front.

There he found Old Pat with every man, woman and child in the village able to walk, and all of them gazing down the lake at the approaching flotilla. Not that they seemed perturbed at the sight. They had long ago learned to let their worrying be done by the devil-devil. He was good at that kind of thing. What they were interested in was to see what form his latest puripuri would take.

Upon arriving at the shore Awati and Bill donned their flying gear and climbed aboard the "Swallow." The Kiwai had been instructed in the use of the Lewis gun, and without being told he went forward into the fore cockpit, while Bill took his place behind one of the wheels. At a sign from him the villagers pushed back the removable section of the barrier, while others set rollers in place before the seaplane. Then slowly the "Swallow" was shoved down through the breach to the water and floated. A last mighty shove from the pigmies sent her forty or fifty feet from shore.

Bill gave the little men on the beach time to replace the barrier, then set his motor to idling. A hurried glance behind showed the tribesmen voicing their astonishment at the noise and the force of the wind from the propeller, of two minds whether to

stop or run. But time was precious, so with a friendly wave of his hand to his friends, Bill faced about and gave the "Swallow" the gun.

Slowly at first, then faster and faster, as he kept widening the throttle, the big seaplane taxied up the lake. Soon Bill jerked her onto the step, and a couple of seconds later, the astounded blacks aboard the rafts saw her leave the water and mount into the air.

At the first sound of the plane's motor, these gentry had stopped their paddling toward the village, and now hardly able to believe their eyes, open-mouthed, and with heads bent backward, they stared up at the speeding air-monster.

To leave the village to the tender mercies of these hillmen was no part of Bill's intention. At the lake's end, he made a sharp flipper turn to port and, shoving over his wheel, zoomed the crowded mass of men on the rafts from behind. Awati, who had his instructions, immediately opened fire with the Lewis. At such close range it was almost impossible to miss, and the Kiwai boy did his work well. Then, as she passed on and over, the plane rose again, banked once more, and dove back at right angles. By this time every hillman able to move had leaped into the water.

Bill does not like to remember those last fifteen minutes above the lake. Granted that the swimmers were savage cannibals bent upon his destruction and

that of the villagers, it seemed a horrible thing to be forced to kill men helpless in the water. Yet unless these savages were got rid of they would later wreak an awful vengeance upon Old Pat's tribe. After the kindness he had received from the villagers, Bill felt that no chances could be taken in that direction.

As for Awati, that bloodthirsty son of New Guinea held no such compunction. He sprayed the swimming cannibals with round after round from his machine gun, while Bill flew the seaplane back and forth over the drowning wretches.

Eventually the necessary work was finished, and as Bill made one last swoop, before rising and pointing the plane's nose toward the lowland swamps and the Fly, he saw the tribe issue from the village and both men and women run along the lake shore toward where their enemies were beginning to land. Certain that those of the hillmen who had escaped death in the water would now find it at the hands of Old Pat and his tribesmen, Bill headed for the Fly River valley and the *Dorothy*.

With the hill country at their backs, gradually the lowland swamps of mangrove, crisscrossed with a network of sluggish streams and dotted with ponds and small lakes, spread out beneath them. And Bill grew more and more nervous by the minute. The "Swallow's" gasoline was running low. Before leaving the vicinity of the lake village, their fan-pump had emptied the containers aft of the propeller, having

pumped the fuel up to the gravity tank, situated on the upper wing section, above the motor. Whether the contents of this tank would last until they sighted the *Dorothy* was a very large question. The lad knew that, should they be forced to land in the swamps, their situation would indeed be a perilous one.

He had purposely set the course north and east of the spot where they had left the expedition days before, stranded on a mudbank, so that he might come down on the Fly farther upstream. As they drew nearer to that great river he beckoned Awati back to the center cockpit, and it was typical of the boy that he did not hesitate. To crawl over the slippery decking of a rocking seaplane in mid-air, with nothing to hold to but the flat deck itself, is a feat no weak stomached person should try. Awati, however, had no nerves and he hopped into the cockpit at last and seated himself beside his master.

Bill handed him the field glasses. Pointing to the river far away in the distant haze, he said *Dorothy* slowly two or three times. Due to the terrific noise of the motor Awati of course could not hear the word. But he read Bill's lips, as the lad had meant him to, and nodding his understanding, focused the lenses upon the long line of the great river.

They were now flying at a height of some four thousand feet, and as the plane drew nearer the Fly, Bill made out a communal Long House near the river

bank, but probably invisible from the water because of a strip of intervening jungle. It reminded him of the giant *ravis* of the delta, although seemingly of a cruder style of architecture, although at that height details were indiscernible.

When the plane came within a mile of the building, neither he nor Awati had as yet caught sight of the expedition's schooner. Then all at once Bill knew by the action of the motor, or rather by its lack of all action whatsoever, that the tank above their heads had run dry. Instinctively he pushed his wheel slightly forward and heading upstream planed down in a long, sweeping arc. Heading for a wide stretch of river just beyond the *ravi*, he landed against the current. Then springing out of the cockpit, he ran forward and let go their small anchor.

On either bank of the Fly canopies of stately palms, cascading bright green vines and creepers gave the impression of solid walls of verdure. Here and there, giant tree-ferns raised their plumed heads, while the brilliant hues of orchids and other blooming plants made the river a veritable stream of fairyland. Bright plumaged parrots and other jungle birds screamed abuse from the tree tops; but, except for the slash of leaping fish and the faint lapping of the water against the hull of the seaplane, there was neither sound nor sign of life.

Bill and his side partner removed the cotton from

their ears, pushed back their goggles and looked at each other.

"Our luck is certainly rotten this trip," remarked the lad. "What price your head and mine, eh? We may be and probably are miles from the *Dorothy*. And what's more, we are too darn close for comfort to that *ravi* we passed over behind the bush yonder!"

"Sure thing you know," Awati made answer. "You, me, Sar, what white man back in Daru call up feller tree in middle of river."

He smiled at his own joke, then turned swiftly about and held up a hand in warning. Faintly, very faintly at first, came the sound of men paddling. Then without further warning around a point half a mile upstream appeared two long war canoes packed with warriors.

Without a word Bill scrambled over the decking and into the fore cockpit. Uncovering the Lewis, he swung it into position and trained it upon the advancing natives. But when he pressed the trigger at extreme range, what was his astonishment and horror to hear no following report. A hurried examination showed that the gun was empty, and turning to the ammunition locker he found that empty too. Awati, with a native's reckless abandon of consequences and lack of foresight, had used up the last of it, firing at the hillmen on the lake. The machine gun was useless.

Chapter XVII

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE FLY

WE must now go back a few days and learn something of what the expedition aboard the *Dorothy* had been doing during the time Bill and Awati were fighting hill pigmies in the mountain village.

On the morning these two left in the seaplane for a reconnoiter of the hill country, the *Dorothy*, if you remember, was lying high and dry on a mudbank in the Fly River, with the water so low that it hardly seemed the same stream of the night before. This mudbank lay off a native settlement whose people, probably because of the failure of their tobacco crop, appeared friendly.

Shortly after the seaplane disappeared over the green wall of jungle, a number of the warriors appeared on the bank. These men carried no arms and in place of weapons held up arrowheads of stone and human skulls, crudely inlaid with shells and colored pebbles. Others waved long cigarette-holders of bamboo in the air, at the same time designating that these were empty. The meaning became plain to those aboard the little vessel. The natives wished to barter for tobacco.

After a short conference, Lieutenant-Commander Smith and Mr. Wells went ashore taking two of the native crew with them. They went armed, each man carrying both rifle and automatic revolver. Heaped in the bottom of the dinghy was a pile of trade-tobacco sticks.

"There's no use taking chances," the Resident Magistrate answered, when Commander Smith remarked that firearms might cause the savages to stampede. "I know that the ship's gun is covering us, but those chaps ashore don't know it. If we let them think they can get away with anything, they'll take our heads just as readily as our tobacco. It's my opinion that they want smokes badly, or they'd have taken to the bush in the first place and we'd never have seen hide or hair of them."

Once ashore, they found the natives shy, though friendly, and it was amusing to see how keen the blacks were to obtain tobacco. They seemed ready to barter their very souls for a stick of kuku. And their method of smoking, once they got it, or rather, their method of inhaling, coughing and gasping, was as original as it was ludicrous.

As soon as a stick of the trade tobacco came into a warrior's possession he shredded it, and dried out all the moisture by holding a glowing ember over the shredded leaf. Then using another leaf instead of paper, he promptly rolled a cigarette. This was inserted in the long bamboo holder and the lighted end

placed in his mouth. He would then exhale vigorously, and as the smoke was blown out of the open end of the holder, that end would be inserted in one of the two holes of a smoke container, also made of bamboo. Continuing to blow the smoke through his holder into this reservoir, he would presently detach the reservoir from the holder and draw the imprisoned smoke into his lungs. And after inhaling a couple of times, he would cough and choke and pass the smoke container on to another warrior.

To Commander Smith this seemed a long and roundabout way of enjoying the weed. When he tried two or three deep inhalations himself, he was almost suffocated, and decided that his own well-colored briar was decidedly preferable.

A number of the women of the tribe, having overcome their fear of the white strangers, put in an appearance and began begging tobacco. Five or six of the ladies were clad in widow's weeds, costumes composed of river mud and grass skirts. And so filthy and generally hideous were the creatures that it was difficult to believe them human.

"What price merry grass widows, Commander?" chuckled Wells, on glimpsing Smith's expression of disgust.

The Naval Officer shook his head. "They would never star in a musical comedy, that's a sure thing," he returned. "A sweet set of beggars, these natives. Look at this dainty piece of art, will you?" He

dangled one of the ornamented skulls before the R. M.'s gaze. "I wonder if this was one of the deceased husbands or only a rejected lover?"

Then, receiving at that moment the prearranged signal from the captain of the *Dorothy*, the shore party gathered their trophies, and getting into the dinghy, were rowed back to the stranded vessel.

Although the Fly River at this point is at least seven hundred yards wide and five to six fathoms deep in the channel, it is entirely uncharted. It runs deep and smoothly, dotted at low tide by occasional mudbanks, upon one of which the ship had gone aground the night before. A turgid stream this, carrying quantities of mud to the delta; and yet for hundreds of miles the Fly is tidal, its fall and rise being somewhat over ten feet.

It was the change of tide that caused the skipper to signal the party trading with the natives. And they had been aboard but a short time, when with a rushing of waters, mudbanks and shallows disappeared, and in a half hour the ship floated clear.

As they forged steadily upstream against the strong current, the shores on either side resembled the drop scenes of stage settings. Mammoth trees were hung with a burden of vines and orchids, in an indescribable glory of coloring, walling the stream to the water's edge. Over little wavelets, sparkling in the blaze of an equatorial sun, myriads of horseflies and butterflies darted to and fro, while birds of

paradise, Goura pigeons and other flocks of beautiful plumage flew overhead or sang in the tree tops.

All during the journey they had faced nothing but the everlasting jungle. As they proceeded up the winding river, the little ship would round a point, and then the prospect would open up to another point just beyond. There had been no break in the monotony of the landscape, but, notwithstanding this, the mystery of this beautiful and unknown hinterland held a powerful fascination for the traveler.

About five that afternoon, nothing having been seen of the seaplane or its crew, the *Dorothy* dropped anchor. There was nothing special to be done on board, so the two white men and three of the native crew rowed ashore with a view to exploring the dense forest. But at this point the jungle proved almost impenetrable, and it was necessary to cut a path every foot of the way. Yet the cool green gloom was extremely gratifying after the heat of the sun on the river, and the party lingered to do a little shooting.

There were birds in plenty, but hidden by the tangle of vines and great massed clumps of foliage, they were difficult to see and harder to shoot. Even when brought down, like as not they fell into the undergrowth and many valuable specimens were lost. Barbed spines of the lawyer vine were a constant and irritating menace, while myriads of needle-beaked mosquitoes and swarms of green ants put a decided damper upon this hunting party. On the whole,

both whites and blacks were not sorry to get back to shore, where they waded into the river and did their best to drown the ants. In no other way were they able to rid themselves of these pests, who, when feasting beneath one's shirt, can make life a horrid burden.

When night fell and the seaplane had not returned, both the Commander and Mr. Wells became really worried. Yet neither could figure a method of procedure until the morning sun should again make passage possible up or down this unplotted and uncharted river.

The Fly carries with it quantities of driftwood, logs and occasionally whole trees, and to prevent the anchor being carried away, and with it the ship, a man was always posted in the bows. Furthermore they were traveling in a hostile country and needed to keep alert both night and day to avoid surprise by savages. But to-night with this added worry on their minds, turn and turn about, the two white men watched through the long hours of darkness.

When morning broke it was decided that the *Dorothy* should retrace her way downstream to the village of the tobacco-loving natives. It was possible that Bill, returning from his cruise in the seaplane, had crashed in landing. The river with its ridges of mud and floating driftwood, difficult to distinguish in the coffee-colored current, was full of peril for an aviator. Or perhaps the lad might have been forced

to land in the swamps near that part of the river where he had left them; for they figured that, homeward bound, the plane would have been headed in that direction. So the *Dorothy* was put about, her bow pointed down the river, and with a favorable current aiding the engine, she hove in sight of the village within a few hours.

The schooner dropped anchor in the middle of the stream and shortly afterward a canoe, filled with natives, put off from the shore, bent on further barter. By means of that primitive sign language, the white men soon learned that these villagers had seen nothing or heard nothing of the seaplane and its occupants. Commander Smith then suggested that he should lead a search party into the swamps; but Mr. Wells soon dampened his hopes in that direction.

"For a white man," declared the R. M., "and quite likely for natives as well, those mangrove swamps, back of the river, are impassable. In all probability they stretch away in scum-covered morasses to the foothills, miles and miles from here. No canoe can penetrate them, and if one went afoot he would be sucked under in the slimy ooze. If Billy and Awati have come down between the Fly and the mountains, I doubt if we ever see them again. I don't mean to seem heartless, Smith, but the unadulterated truth is best at a time like this. On the other hand, they may have been forced to land in the foothills—something of course must have happened

to delay their return—and if so, when they are able to get away again, they will head for the Fly and endeavor to find us. My suggestion is that we cruise up the river for the next few days and then drop back to this point. If they don't show up within a couple of weeks, we will continue up to the Strickland and from there on to its junction with the Herbert. That stream I believe to be the outlet of Lake Murray. Anyway, by that time we will be getting nearer to the mountains. The ground may be higher, and we can start afoot for the hills and work our way along them back to the part of the country Bill was headed for. In the meantime we may run into natives who know something about your brother. What do you think?"

"I agree," said the Commander. "Your plan is the safe and sane thing to do. Of course, I am frightfully worried about Bill. I feel toward him as I would toward a son, if I had one, but there is no sense losing our own lives in the swamps and thereby cutting off all chance of locating both him and his father. We'll do as you say, Wells, and we'll trust that luck is with us."

And so for the next few days, the *Dorothy* patrolled the Fly above the village where they had bartered tobacco. They saw river banks reminiscent of ruined castles covered with vines, for the forest was luxuriously festooned with D'Albertis creeper, scarlet, orange and mauve blossoms massed in solid

splotches of color; they explored scores of lagoons which indented the swamps on either side of the river, each and every one of them walled by similar tapestries of blossoms; they saw flocks of the paradise bird, the most beautiful of all winged creatures, but never a glimpse did they catch of Billy and Awati or the seaplane.

One day the little ship came to trees where, for about a mile along the river front, myriads of flying foxes perched, or rather hung, in the peculiar manner these strange animals have, and the men aboard were able to notice the singular method they use when alighting on a branch. Their wings would close as they perched, and then, allowing gravitation to come into action, over the flying fox would go until it hung from the branch head down; suspended in this fashion the ugly creatures maintained a slow motion of their wings, fanning themselves to keep cool. A shot or two from Commander Smith's rifle awakened and startled the flock so that it took wing, and the sky became alive with flying foxes whirling in great clouds above the camping place.

The third time after leaving the village, on their return trip upstream, it was decided that they should cruise on up to where that great artery of New Guinea, the Strickland River joins the Fly on its journey to the Gulf of Papua.

Early on the third morning of the trip those aboard the ship had glimpsed a communal Long

House, through a narrow break in the jungle, with never a native in sight. Several miles above this *ravi*, two large lagoons wound their crooked ways into the swamps on either side of the river. Since these two bodies of water were almost opposite each other, the R. M. suggested he take the dinghy and a couple of the crew and explore the one to the right, while Commander Smith and the remainder of the crew run up the left-hand creek in the *Dorothy*.

As this suggestion was a practical one and would undoubtedly facilitate the matter of saving precious time, it was acted upon immediately. So taking leave from Commander Smith on board the schooner, Mr. Wells stepped into the dinghy, and presently the little craft slipped into the turgid waters of the lagoon.

The black boys had pulled half a mile up the winding stream when upon rounding another bend they literally rowed into two large war canoes crowded with savages. The R. M. had not had time to discharge his rifle when he saw the rower on the forward thwart of the dinghy crumple up, a spear through his back. Then something blunt and heavy crashed down upon his skull and Mr. Wells knew no more.

Chapter XVIII

TRAPPED AGAIN

UPON regaining consciousness, Mr. Wells found himself lying in the bottom of a canoe, bound hand and foot with thick fibers which burned his wrists and ankles painfully. There was an abominable throbbing in his head, and he would have given ten years of his life for a draught of water.

But he entertained not the least hope of being permitted to live even ten hours longer. The raw-boned, befeathered cannibals who were his captors would attend promptly to the ending of his earthly career. They were saving him only for torture when they should reach their *ravi* or village, that was all. Lifting their paddles in silent unison they drove the heavy canoe ahead with a speed that made the water ripple and curl against the sides with an enticing gurgle that almost drove the parched prisoner in the bow to the verge of insanity.

Wells knew that the chance of a rescue was slim indeed. When he and his two black boys did not show up on the river, the *Dorothy* would undoubtedly head up the lagoon in order to discover the reason for their non-appearance. There the expedition might come across the empty dinghy, if the war

party had not sunk the boat. But the fact that the cannibals had not been attacked by Commander Smith was conclusive evidence that the canoes had slipped out of the creek and down the Fly while the *Dorothy* was still engaged in exploring the lagoon on the other side of the river. Commander Smith would have no idea where he and the two black boys had disappeared to; and if by lucky chance the ship should come upon the village of these head-hunters within the next few days, all that they would find would be his ornamented skull and a few well-picked bones. Not a pleasing matter to cogitate upon, and the Resident Magistrate resolutely turned his thoughts in other directions.

He was horribly uncomfortable lying in the bottom of the war-canoe, and gradually, by dint of grasping at the gunwale with his bound hands, he managed to raise himself to a sitting position. The warriors, knowing that he could not escape, paid no attention to this move. They kept up the long swinging stroke of their paddles and forged down the river as though he did not exist.

Wells leaned against the side of the canoe and gazed at the sunshine sparkling on the water. He wondered if by any chance he might throw himself into the stream and drown, thereby checkmating his captors. Just then the two canoes rounded a bend and the white man's heart almost stopped beating. A few hundred yards away, anchored in midstream

lay the "Swallow," and aboard her he made out the figures of two men.

The R. M. expected that Bill or Awati would open fire with the machine gun, but his hopes in that direction soon dissipated. It could not be that the two aboard the plane had failed to note the approach of the war party, yet they allowed the canoes to come on without firing a shot. Presently Wells began to realize the truth; the seaplane's ammunition was spent, and now instead of going to his death alone, he would have the company of the young American and his Kiwai boy.

He saw Bill and Awati leave the cockpit and take their stand on the decking forward. They had donned their flying helmets, and both of them carried rifles in the hollow of their arms. But the white man in the canoe knew that two rifles could not stop a war party of this size. Although a few of the head-hunters might be killed, the death of their comrades would but infuriate the rest of the cannibals. The two aboard the plane would only bring about his end the sooner. A quick death, however, was preferable to one by torture, and with straining eyes he awaited the forthcoming developments.

The war canoes kept steadily on downstream until they were within spear-hurling distance of the seaplane. Then a chief in the accompanying canoe caught up his weapon and stood poised taking aim, the paddlers backing water the while.

At that moment, Wells saw Bill raise his rifle to the shoulder. There came a sharp report—a howl of fear and pain from the chief, and the spear as though caught by an unseen hand flew high in the air and fell with a splash into the water. The savage wrung his hand, for the shock of the bullet coming in contact with the shaft of his spear had jarred him to the elbow. Then while the paddlers continued to hold both craft in check, Bill lowered his rifle and raised a friendly hand in greeting.

The R. M. understood many of the native languages and dialects and had no difficulty in making out, from his captors' excited jargon, that to them firearms were unknown and that the smashing of the chief's spear at such a distance was viewed as puripuri of the highest order. Who were these strange beings aboard the stranger craft, they asked one another. A fearsome type of devil-devil surely with their smooth brown heads and goggle eyes.

For five long minutes the warriors waited for another, and more terrible, demonstration of the devil-devils' powers. Then the chief who had lost his spear plucked up enough courage to address the men aboard the plane.

"Who are you?" he called. "What do you want of me and my men?"

Without hesitation Awati's voice answered that he and Bill were devil-devils from the sky; that they

came in peace to visit these great warriors and to place tabus upon all their enemies.

The chief conferred with his tribesmen. What assurance would he be given that they were really the devil-devils they claimed to be? he asked at last. Something had caught the spear out of his hand and had thrown it far in the air, that he knew; but it might have been the work of other and unseen devil-devils. The devil-devil aboard the strange canoe had only pointed a spear at him and made a big noise.

Awati immediately answered with another question.

"Will the chief believe," he called, "if we make the chief's canoe sink under him and disappear in the river by just pointing our spears at it?"

The chief replied that he and his whole tribe would believe anything the devil-devils said if they could perform puripuri of that kind.

Awati and Bill both raised their guns and this time they fired at the waterline of the war canoe amidships. Their bullets ripped through the thin hull as if it had been paper, and before the bewildered chief and his tribesmen realized what had happened, they found themselves in the river, their ship sunk beneath the purling ripples.

As the two on board the plane had taken particular pains not to hit any of the natives, those gentry promptly swam ashore.

The *ravi* of these warriors was located in the

jungle just beyond where the seaplane was moored, and the sound of the firing had brought others of the tribe to the riverside. Paddling past the "Swallow," the remaining canoe tied up at the bank, and Mr. Wells with another prisoner, a black youth whom he now glimpsed for the first time, were put ashore. The warriors then held an excited palaver with those of the tribe who had not formed part of the head-hunting expedition.

Presently Wells' and the other prisoner's leg bonds were removed and they were hustled into the bush. The last glimpse the Resident Magistrate caught of the river, a canoe with the chief and four paddlers had set off toward the seaplane. In his hand the chief held a green branch, the sign of friendship.

Although for the time being, Bill and Awati seemed to have put the fear of their magic into the hearts of these superstitious savages, Wells doubted their power to keep these wild tribesmen to heel for long. Soon the chief or one of his followers would demand an impossible demonstration of their god-head, and then the end would come—and quickly.

In the meantime he and his fellow prisoner marched along a narrow path through the swampy jungle. At every ten or twenty paces along this native highway strings of dried seed-pods or withered human hands had been stretched across, fetishes to keep away evil spirits. After a ten-minute walk,

which caused Wells' stiffened legs exquisite agony, they came upon an open space and a communal Long House.

As they approached, and before they were led into this building, the white man caught sight of twenty or thirty small huts built on piles in the swamp just beyond. These he knew must be the women's and children's quarters. In some of the New Guinea villages married men and other warriors dwell in a great clubhouse or dubu, and into one of these he and the other prisoner were taken. Built on piles, fifteen feet above the level of the reeking mangrove flats, this giant structure of palm thatch over a framework of poles, windowless and forbidding, was more than four hundred feet long and its vast arched entrance towered fully sixty feet above the flooring.

From without its grim portals filtered a dim twilight, and as the R. M.'s eyes became more accustomed to the gloom, he saw that he and the black boy were being led down a passageway toward the rear of the dubu, between pens whose walls ran as high as his shoulders. These sleeping places of the men were decorated with huge masks, gopes (decorative shields), fighting shields and weapons; and in each was the inevitable rack containing the skulls of victims he had killed and generally eaten.

Presently the party came to a wall. A curtain of dried grasses and fibers was thrust aside and they entered an apartment in which there was no light of

any kind. Walking a little farther, they evidently crossed this room for they came to another wall. After passing through a second curtained aperture, the prisoners were thrown to the floor and scientifically trussed up with long pliable fibers until they could move nothing but their heads. Their captors left the chamber making sure that escape was impossible, and the reed curtain fell back into place, leaving them in a stifling darkness.

They must have lain straining at their bonds for at least half an hour, although it seemed much longer to the R. M., when the curtain was pulled back and two other prisoners tumbled into the room. Wells could hear the tribesmen tightening the fastenings of these new arrivals and then they departed again, leaving the four prisoners to their own devices.

"We've certainly landed ourselves in a tight fix this time, Awati," remarked a familiar voice. And Wells knew that Bill's ruse had not succeeded.

"Hello, Bill," he said. "You've got company in your troubles, if that is any satisfaction."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the lad. "Am I hearing things? That sounds like Mr. Wells' voice."

"It's Wells all right, Billy—or rather it's all wrong. I'm tied up hand and foot—can't move anything but my fingers. There's another poor devil with me, a native, though I don't know any more about him than that."

"How did you get caught, sir?" demanded Bill.

"Are Uncle Jack and the rest of the crew O. K.?"

The R. M. retailed the story of his capture. "By the way," he ended, "you and Awati were in a fair way to becoming the local gods when I glimpsed you last. How did you meet your Waterloo?"

Bill laughed ruefully. "It was one of those beastly midges," he replied. "We kept on our helmets and goggles, and the chief and his warriors thought they grew on us just as we meant them to!" He chuckled, then resumed his tale. "But on the way over to the village, one of those insects crawled inside my goggles and stung me on the eyelid. And the darn thing, it kept on stinging, so I simply had to kill it. As soon as I ripped the goggles off, the blacks set up a howl. They ripped away our helmets and half my clothes as well. I thought they would finish by braining us on the spot. But after a powwow, Awati, who can understand their jargon, says they decided to keep us for torture. There's going to be a dance of celebration later on, and after that we'll be taken out and cast for star parts in the entertainment. The lot of us are up against it good and plenty. I left a note for Uncle Jack aboard the plane, but it's a cinch, we'll all be mince meat before he finds it. Awati says it won't be more than an hour before these niggers start in on the dirty work."

There fell a silence, interrupted at last by a series of harsh clicking gutturals which proved to be the voice of the fourth prisoner. The words of this un-

couth tongue were immediately answered by Awati, who presently switched to what he would have told you was white man's talk.

"This feller black boy," he translated, "say his feller teeth A1 good. Say no can catchum rope—tied along too much." (Awati meant that the young native was tied so tightly that it was impossible for him to reach his own bonds with his teeth.) "Black boy say," he continued, "Massa Well most near. Will roll along floor. Can do. Stop along Massa Well—put him teeth on feller rope. Can do maybe."

"Tell him to come along at once if he can," declared the R. M. "If he can do it, he's a wonder—I can't move an inch myself. If he can get his teeth on the fibers binding my wrists and cut through them in time, we may yet be able to break out of here!"

Awati spoke again to the native, and soon a shuffling, scraping sound was heard as the pinioned black boy slowly wriggled his way over the floor of saplings. Five minutes later, Wells felt the native's teeth working at his bonds, and a comparatively short time afterward his hands were free. He was stiff and sore, but he managed to rid himself of the remainder of his bindings, and at once set about releasing the other three.

"I think," it was Wells who spoke, "I think, Bill, that this room we are in is at the rear end of the

dubu. My plan is that we rip up enough of the flooring to let us squeeze through. Then if we are not seen doing it, we'll hike over the flats to the river."

"You're on, sir," returned the lad. "Awati, tell the other chap what we are going to do, and then for Pete's sake, let's get busy before those fellows outside get wind of what's going on."

Making just as little noise as possible, the four managed to raise part of the flooring, and then one after the other, they dropped onto the soggy ground beneath. There they found themselves in a dim tunnel whose walls were the piles upon which the dubu was built. These posts had been driven into the flat about six inches and the escaping men had no difficulty in getting a view of the villagers. The tribe had congregated in an open space near the women's huts and were beginning a dance of thanksgiving for the safe return of the head-hunting party. Luckily this village forum was located on the side of the dubu away from the river; so, without wasting more time, the four set about loosening a couple of the piles. Through the aperture at last, they broke into a run and streaked across the flats into the shelter of the jungle.

Another five minutes brought them to the shore of the Fly, where they saw the "Swallow" still pulling at her anchor in the middle of the river. Wells

flung himself on the bank of the stream and gulped mouthfuls of the muddy water.

"If we swim over to the plane, those chaps in the village are sure to find us there," panted Bill. "What's your idea, Mr. Wells? Better go easy on the drink."

Wells got to his feet, but he did not answer at once. Instead, he held up his hand. Out of the jungle behind came a chorus of native shouts and yells.

"The beggars know we have given them the slip," he said quietly. "The plane is no good to us at present, lad. There must be canoes cached along here somewhere, and by Jove, we've got to find one in a hurry."

But already Awati and the young native were calling and Billy and Wells, running along the shore, saw them tugging at the bow of a war canoe half hidden in the undergrowth.

The New Guinea native does not build his canoe of bark, but fashions it from the trunk of a single tree which he hollows out with fire and the help of a stone adze. It took several minutes to float that heavy craft, and all four were panting by the time they jumped aboard and pushed off from the bank.

Luckily, paddles were found below the narrow thwarts, and soon they had swung against the current and were racing their craft upstream.

Driving the war canoe through the water as though the devil himself was behind, they had paddled less than fifty yards when the villagers came into view along the river bank. The blacks did not stop and think what they had best do. With a speed almost incredible, two other war canoes were launched, warriors threw themselves aboard, and grasping their paddles set off in pursuit.

"Here they come," said Bill through his teeth, after a hasty glance behind.

"We'll give them a run for their money," returned Mr. Wells. "But it won't be for long, I'm afraid. Each of those canoes carries twenty men. The odds are five to one they'll catch us in half a mile."

Chapter XIX

HAMOJI

ALTHOUGH the four in the stolen canoe continued to wield their paddles with every ounce of their strength, the pursuing craft gained swiftly upon them. None of the four boasted a weapon of any kind, and a speedy and horrible fate seemed inevitable.

All at once Bill, who was in the bow gave a shout, for around the bend of the river appeared the *Dorothy*, her propeller churning the muddy water into coffee-colored foam.

The savages in the war canoe spied her at the same time, and her bow gun sent a shot above the startled natives' heads, that disturbed thousands of jungle birds and sent them flying in multi-colored clouds above the trees. The tribesmen, evidently judging discretion to be the better part of valor, headed about and raced their craft for the village.

The policy of the expedition was to fight only in self-defense; so the Commander did not bother further with the cannibals. The schooner's motor was stopped; and, a few minutes later, Billy, Mr. Wells and the two black boys clambered over the side amidst the hearty cheering of the crew.

After short explanations had been given and received, the little ship dropped downstream, and taking the seaplane in tow, proceeded up the river again. Not a native was seen. The warriors, together with the rest of the tribe probably expecting annihilation, had melted into the jungle, leaving their craft beached in the river mud.

None of the rescued four had touched food for many hours, so while Awati and the strange young native bolted a meal on the forecastle hatch, Billy and Mr. Wells breakfasted in state farther aft.

Commander Smith and the R. M. were immensely interested in the tale of Bill's adventures among the pigmies of the hills. Said his uncle, after the story had been brought to a conclusion:

"I can't find it in my heart to censure you, Bill. Had I been in your place, I couldn't have handled the situation better. Of course when you and Awati didn't show up, we became frightfully worried, but somehow I seemed to have a hunch that if you were only given half a chance, you'd land on your feet; and I must say you seem to have done just that."

"It's mighty lucky the *Dorothy* happened to show up when she did," remarked Bill. "I reckon, if she hadn't, Mr. Wells and I would be landing in the stomachs of those blacks, via the cook pot route, about now. How was it, sir, that she came round that point when she did?"

"When the dinghy with Mr. Wells and the two

boys did not come out of the lagoon," replied his uncle, "we let go anchor in mid-channel and waited for possibly an hour. As Mr. Wells has probably told you, we had been exploring a creek on the other side of the river. But as time went on, feeling that something must have gone wrong, I had the anchor up and sailed into the lagoon. We literally combed that creek for hours. Then, just as we had given up hope, our propeller stirred up a backwash, and one of the dead boys came floating to the surface. After a bit, we found the other chap. Both were minus their heads, so we knew the natives had got them. I thought, of course, friend Wells had fared likewise, but the crew said that being a white man the war party would keep him for torture and to exhibit to the rest of the tribe. We couldn't be sure whether the natives had gone up or down the river, but as we knew of the village below, I had the *Dorothy* headed downstream and—well, here we are together again, thank goodness. By the way, Wells, if those two boys have finished their meal on the hatch, let's have them aft. That fellow prisoner of yours is the queerest looking Papuan I've ever seen."

"A fine looking chap, just the same," declared the R. M. "He might belong to one of the lost tribes of Israel, except for his color. His type is clearly Semitic."

The two natives were had aft, and as they squatted on their heels near the breakfast table, the differ-

ence between them was striking. Although both were young men in the early twenties, tall and well-built, the golden bronze of the newcomer's skin sharply contrasted Awati's coal-black visage or that of any other New Guinea native the white men had ever seen. Awati's hair and that of the pigmies and the Fly River men was little better than wool. This boy's was simply curly. The jet-black mop was shorn off in front, but behind it hung below his shoulders in profuse ringlets and pigtails. Yet strangest of all, the face of this young man was the face of a good-looking Hebrew. Could he be one of that fabled tribe, in search of whom Billy's father had disappeared up the Fly? Bill was about to voice this remark, when Awati cut in on his thoughts.

"This feller boy talk along talk Awati can do—far up Fly River talk," he declaimed. "Awati no get along everything—"

The Commander interrupted. "Ask him what his name is, and where he comes from."

"Say name Hamoji. He no Fly River boy—belong along Sambio, all same Awati belong Kiwai. Say bin come down river along feller heads. No catchum feller heads—Fly River boy bin along catch him. No kill Hamoji—want Hamoji show way along feller lake Sambio stop along."

"Wait a bit," broke in Mr. Wells. "I think I can understand something of this chap's lingo—Awati, although fluent, is a bit cryptic at times."

He turned to Hamoji and for some time the two discoursed in deep, coughing gutturals.

"By Jove!" the R. M. exclaimed, switching to English. "Here's a find. The fellow comes from a village on a lake, which from what he says, is most likely Lake Murray. From all I can make out, he was captured by the Fly River natives on the Strickland when the two head-hunting parties ran afoul of each other. But his second piece of information is news indeed. He says that a white man has been living with the tribes for many moons. I don't want to raise the hopes of you chaps unduly—from time to time, white men have gone up this river never to return—but I can't help feeling there's a good chance this white stranger may be Mr. Smith."

Bill's heart nearly stopped beating, and his uncle registered keen interest.

"I knew Dad wasn't dead. I always said so, didn't I, Uncle Jack?"

The Commander laid a hand on his nephew's shoulder. "Take it easy, son," he cautioned. "As Mr. Wells says, we mustn't raise our hopes. But the outlook certainly is brighter. Now that we know as much as we do, we'll make Lake Murray, or whatever lake this lad comes from, just as fast as the old ship can be pushed ahead."

Mr. Wells, who had been talking with Hamoji, gave him a cigar and sent him forward with Awati.

"Queer boy that," he announced. "Hamoji's lan-

guage seems to be a more primitive form of some of the Fly River dialects, though, heaven knows, they are all primitive enough. He tells me he is the son of a chief, and that the white man who is living in their *ravi* with them saved his life and the lives of half the tribe, when a great sickness came to them six moons back."

"Dad knows as much about medicine as most doctors," exclaimed Bill. "I'm sure it's he. Won't you let me take the plane, Uncle Jack, and fly up to the lake? I could take Hamoji along to show me the way and get there days before the *Dorothy*."

"Sorry, lad, but it can't be done," answered the Commander. "Not that I doubt but what you would carry out the flight successfully. There's not much gas aboard, and we must conserve it. In the meantime, you and I will give the old bus a thorough overhauling. We'll probably need the 'Swallow' when we get to the lake, and I promise that you will be the first one to take her up."

The two Smiths spent the rest of the day aboard the seaplane. She towed behind the *Dorothy* well enough, but it was always necessary for one of the black boys to remain at the wheel. While he steered, Bill and his uncle cleaned the motor, and after seeing that everything aboard was shipshape once more, they refilled her gasoline tanks.

By late afternoon there came a change in the river scenery. The jungle dwindled and the vegetation

along the banks became less prolific and luxuriant. Occasional patches of great fertility were passed, but, for the most part, the shores of the Fly were covered with fresh-water mangroves, which smelled to high heaven, and reeds.

When the schooner dropped anchor for the night, Bill climbed to the mast top from where he could see over the high reeds onto vast areas of flat, grass-covered land. These plain-like stretches were quite devoid of trees, a strange sight to gaze upon after the dense jungle through which the ship had been traveling day after day.

Next morning about ten o'clock they reached the junction of the Fly and the Strickland Rivers, and entered the Strickland at what is known as Everill Junction, an unimpressive locality, among low, flat banks, covered with reeds and stunted trees. This immense river proved scarcely less wide than the Fly although the current was much swifter. Near its entrance to the Fly, the Strickland is remarkably circuitous, and they followed the course of the stream for seven hours, at the end of which time they found themselves only a couple of miles north of the starting point. The river had described a complete horseshoe with its extremities drawn close together.

When darkness drew on, the anchor was dropped in a lee of the main stream and the three white men, with Awati and Hamoji, went ashore in the dinghy. It proved difficult to row against the stream, and near

the bank the swift current swept them back. At last they succeeded in reaching the slack water of a small point. But on getting ashore, the undergrowth was so heavy that although many birds were about, it became practically impossible to locate them in the gloom. Soon mosquitoes and ants made themselves unpleasant and the disappointed shooting party hastened for the dinghy and were rowed out to the ship.

That night the mosquitoes, which flew in vast swarms over the river, were the worst the expedition had so far encountered. They were a torment and an agony. Even the thick-skinned black boys suffered and nobody got any sleep.

With daylight, these pests became worse if anything. The three whites and every black boy aboard wrapped thick blankets about their legs and donned puncture-proof suits. Mosquito shelters were built for the steersman and lookout, but even these were of very little use. Every one, not needed in the running of the vessel and the towing of the plane, kept below deck. Although the heat there with closed hatches was like an inferno, it was preferable to the stinging demons without.

All day long the little ship forced the passage of the Strickland, navigating so far as possible in the lee of points and bends and thus avoiding the swift current in midstream. And, as before, the banks were seen to be highly grown with margins of tall

reeds and quite inaccessible, excepting in the occasional gaps.

About three in the afternoon, they entered the Herbert River, an unobtrusive stream through which the fabled Lake Murray was believed to find an outlet. The Strickland continued on, unabated in width or volume, so Hamoji told them for another hundred and fifty miles. Then the first rapids appear, and it is not for another hundred miles before the river gets into the mountains. As the ship drew nearer his home, the Sambio lad became more and more excited, and jabbered incessantly to Awati and the other men.

Billy found the Herbert much more entertaining than the Strickland. For one thing, the mosquitoes, though plentiful, were not so bad as on that swift-moving stream. The Herbert, like a narrow canal, meandered across great grass-covered flats and patches of jungle, and some of its reaches were exceedingly beautiful. When they had anchored that evening, he took Awati and Hamoji with him and went bird-shooting ashore. Luck was good and they returned to the *Dorothy* in about an hour with enough for a hearty meal for every one on board.

The following day they continued up the Herbert, which ran from one to three hundred yards in width, and from three to six fathoms deep. Hour after hour they slid past banks laid out by nature like an artificial water course. Low grass lay at the water's

edge, then came tall reeds and lastly, a brilliant background of trees, vines and flowers.

Toward late afternoon, the trees dwindled, and presently above the reeds the distant waters of an inland sea could be glimpsed shimmering in the last rays of the dying sun.

At last Lake Murray was an actuality, and Billy went to his hammock that night in a fever of excited expectation. What would the morrow bring forth?

Chapter XX

SAMBIO

COMMANDER SMITH decided to wait until morning to enter the lake. His reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, knowing nought of its uncharted water, he did not care to run the *Dorothy* aground; and secondly, the treachery of New Guinea natives is proverbial. The Sambio could not know that the son of their chief was on board the ship, and the Commander did not care to be stranded on a mudbank or reef, should an attack take place.

During the night all on board were again harassed by mosquitoes and by numberless swarms of diminutive gnats attracted by the night lights. These came in clouds from the swamps, until it became impossible to breathe without getting them in one's mouth and nostrils. Presently all artificial light was dispensed with.

Toward morning, across the waters of the lake, came the tom-tom of drums, frogs chorused their song from the marshes, and above all blew gentle zephyrs from the south laden with the sweet fragrance of flowers.

At daybreak a hurried breakfast was got over, and then Bill, with Awati and Hamoji, went aboard the

plane to make a reconnoiter of Lake Murray. The *Dorothy*, in the meantime, was to sail across its waters toward a bluff on the farther shore upon which, the Sambio lad told them, lay the *ravi* of his tribe.

With Hamoji seated beside him in the main cockpit and Awati forward, Bill waved good-by to those aboard the schooner and started to taxi up the river toward the open water. Soon they were skimming the lake's unruffled surface. When the plane had developed sufficient speed, Bill jerked her onto the step and took off into air, undisturbed by even a breath of wind.

As they left the water, Bill saw the boy beside him grow tense with excitement. But as they continued to glide swiftly and smoothly through the ether he gave the American a smile of pleasure and goodfellowship, and Bill knew that this Stone Age lad by his side was indeed a good sport.

Below, Lake Murray spread out like a bright spot of silver-blue, shimmering in the sunlight. Then, when they had gained more altitude, Bill saw that the plane was flying over a body of water about twenty-five miles long and as many wide. Circling about, he spotted the *Dorothy* pushing her way up the last half mile of the Herbert, while beyond the lake, in all directions, bright green mangrove swamps, splotched with the darker green of stunted tree clumps, stretched on and out to a cloudless horizon.

Again he banked, heading for the farther shore, and presently he located the bluff which was to be their destination. From Hamoji's gesticulations, it was evident that he recognized it. Bill spiraled down as they drew closer and landed on the water some fifty yards offshore.

On the bluff, which raised its head about thirty feet above the swamp of the adjoining shore line, an immense communal house commanded the lake. The roof, projecting in a tapering snout, evidently symbolized a crocodile with jaws a-yawn, while its ridge-pole projected an additional twelve feet and was split at the end, beak-like, with a human thigh-bone thrust in transversely, as if to suggest the armorial bearings of the tribe.

After the flyers had removed helmets and goggles, Hamoji explained, through the medium of Awati, that this amazing community house on its strategic site, was indeed the home of his tribe. He pointed out the great front porch of the building, saying that it commanded a prospect over the entire lake. The Sambio, of course, in event of surprise, or defeat, could quickly melt away from the house into the shadows of the near-by bamboo thickets.

Men were now paddling out from shore in dugout canoes. The rowers stood erect, and propelled their craft with very long paddles, the shafts of which terminated in large, flat blades. It occurred to Bill that the fashioning of these paddles from a solid

piece of timber, with only adzes of stone for tools, must be tedious work. The canoes also impressed him greatly. They were shaped with a long, "clipper" taper, bows and sterns finely excavated, and devoid of outriggers.

Half consciously, he absorbed these details, while with anxious eyes, he scanned the persons of the paddlers. There was no white man among them.

He asked a question of Awati, who in turn spoke to Hamoji. The Sambio lad nodded, and springing to the fore deck of the "Swallow," in full view of the approaching natives, commenced to harangue them. Bill had previously noticed the sweetness of Hamoji's voice, and he soon learned that the voices of all these Sambio warriors, cruel cannibals though they were, and utterly pitiless toward enemies, were rich in tone, a pleasing contrast to the harsh sounds uttered by the pigmy hillmen and the rough gutturals of the Fly River tribes.

As the Sambio flotilla drew nearer the plane, Hamoji was recognized, and the canoemen began shouting back to him. They waved their paddles and called delighted greetings until brought to a stop by a tall, dignified native standing in the bow of the first canoe. This gentleman, who wore a gorgeous crown of paradise plumes, Hamoji pointed out as his father. And the chief, upon recognizing his son, speeded the paddlers to greater efforts. At a word from him, however, one of the canoes turned and

made for the shore, its boatmen calling to the natives lining the bluff as they went.

Hamoji in his shouts to his father had evidently told him of the debt he owed Bill, for upon gaining the "Swallow," the great man's greeting to our hero was most cordial. He appeared enormously interested in the plane, and the fact that his son should have arrived in it seemed to fill him with wonder and pride.

About this time the canoe which had paddled back to shore put forth again, but on this trip the excited white lad aboard the seaplane saw, that standing in her bow, was a heavily bearded man wearing a dilapidated sun helmet, which at one time had been white.

"Father!" shouted Billy, almost beside himself. "It's me—Billy—don't you know me, Dad?"

That explorer Smith was surprised and overjoyed to meet his son, whom he thought to be on the opposite side of the world, goes without saying. His canoe had no more than nosed the "Swallow's" side, when he sprang aboard and caught his boy in a bearlike hug.

Later, the seaplane was beached at the foot of the bluff. The natives and the two whites marched up the path to the open space before the *ravi* and the women of the tribe bustled about getting a feast in readiness.

Bill's father explained that for nearly a year he had lived with the Sambios. He and his Kiwai boys had explored the Fly to its headwaters. Then re-

turning down to the Strickland, they had made their way up that fast-moving stream. Where the Herbert empties into it, his expedition had come pell-mell upon a canoe battle between Strickland River natives and a Sambio head-hunting party. The river men had at once attacked the explorer's launch. Naturally, he and his men defended themselves, and beat off the savages with their guns.

The Sambios, who up to this time had been getting the worst of it, hailed the white man as their deliverer, and with the survivors of his little band, Mr. Smith had journeyed with them to the *ravi* on Lake Murray. There his knowledge of medicine had further endeared him to the tribe. But when he spoke of leaving, they refused to allow him to do so. Though in reality a prisoner, he had been kindly treated, and being an enthusiastic anthropologist, he nad employed his time studying the manners, customs and language of these Stone Age people.

He pointed out to Bill that the tribe was living much the same way our own ancestors lived thousands of years ago in the forests of Europe, and it did not take the lad long to realize that his father had spent a thoroughly interesting and busy year. The elder Smith showed particular interest in his son's adventures among the pigmies and questioned him at length concerning the little hillmen and their peculiarities.

That his brother should have headed a rescue ex-

pedition seemed to annoy him. He declared it a waste of money and time. When he had studied these people sufficiently, he told Bill, he would find a means of escape, never fear. Of course, it was decent of Jack to take all this trouble, and he would tell him so as soon as the *Dorothy* arrived. Bill began to understand, though, that his father did not in the least consider himself as a man who had been rescued from a desperate plight, and when the lad thought the matter over, he began to see it in the same light.

About noon, the schooner hove in sight, and a little later Commander Smith and Mr. Wells came ashore. After the first greetings were over, the chief and his principal warriors were presented and all sat down to a really sumptuous repast. During the afternoon the party were taken on a tour of inspection of the communal house. They found that the main entrance hall was divided into rectangles by laying heavy saplings, and lashing them transversely. Here the fighting men of each family slept on the bare ground. During the night they curled closely about smoldering embers to avoid the mosquitoes, while throughout the day one saw them squatting on the saplings, grinding stone axes, fashioning arrow heads and barbarously pointed spears from bones with flint gouges. All day long they chewed betel nut. This disgusting habit caused their teeth to turn black, and before long Bill wondered if the Sambios chewed betel nut in their sleep as well. Near by, their bows and arrows and

stone clubs were hung where they could be easily snatched up in case of attack. From the rafters dangled war trophies, human skulls, bones, locks of hair and the like.

The family section of the communal house was partitioned off from the warriors' part by a wall of lashed sago frond stems. In the faint light Bill could make out two rows of little pens fenced off by low barriers, each with its sleeping platform. The whole place was inexpressively crude and dirty. The elder Smith said that even he had not been able to go the house as a place to rest. He had obtained permission and always slept beside a smoldering fire in the open. Rain or shine it held its advantages.

For some days Bill with Awati, Hamoji and some of the young Sambio warriors fished and shot wild fowl on the lake. Game was plentiful and he found that these bronze natives were keen sportsmen.

The chief of the Sambio tribe continued to be affability itself, and two weeks later, after many presents had been exchanged, he made no objection to explorer Smith leaving with the expedition.

Billy's father got his collection of human skulls, arrow heads, flints, spears and shields safely stowed aboard the *Dorothy*, and in return gave the Sambios steel axes, knives and empty tin cans. Empty oil and gasoline tins were also prized by the savages; for these primitive folk are entirely destitute of any ma-

terials for utensils, whatsoever. Beyond bamboo and a few water baskets made by folding a sheaf of the Guru palm, they had known no means of carrying liquids before the arrival of the Smith Expedition.

Bill presented Hamoji and the chief with a rifle apiece, together with automatic revolvers and many boxes of ammunition. On his part, the lad received a splendid collection of spears, war clubs, stone axes and bows and arrows. The day before the expedition left for home, he was taken into the Sambio tribe as a chief's son, and his head was adorned with a priceless crown of paradise plumes. He had become very fond of the life and the tribe, and in the last two weeks Hamoji had become a close friend and comrade.

Billy flew his father and Awati from Lake Murray back to Daru, at which place they waited for the others following more slowly in the schooner. When that worthy little ship at last arrived at the island, Mr. Wells bought the seaplane. The *Dorothy*, which had been rented for the expedition, carried the three Smiths and Awati (the faithful black boy refused to be parted from his young master) on to Port Moresby, where she was returned to her owner. From that unattractive town on the New Guinea coast, the four of them caught a steamer bound for Sydney.

The quartette of explorers continued the journey

back to America in easy stages, and shortly after their arrival at Norfolk, Commander Smith secured Bill an appointment to Annapolis.

The next two months were spent by him at a preparatory school in Maryland's capital city, and here he buckled down to hard book-work with a will. It had always been the lad's ambition to become a naval officer, preferably a naval flyer, and now that his chance had come he did not shirk the drudgery.

When the examinations were held, that hard work proved its worth, for Bill passed everything and graduated with flying colors. His further adventures will be found in the next book of this series—"Billy Smith Secret Service Ace, or Adventures in Arabia."

The following Christmas Eve, a trim young midshipman ran up the steps and rang the doorbell of Commander Smith's quarters at Hampton Roads. The door was presently opened by a black man in the white linen coat of a southern house-servant.

"Hello, Awati!" cried the midshipman. "What price pickled pigmy heads to-day?"

"Massa Bill!" cried the Kiwai. "My goodness, Sar, no know you first off—you so fine in feller officer clothes. We sure is glad to see you, Sar. And is you A1 big feller officer now, Sar?"

"Learning to be, Awati," laughed Bill, grasping his hand.

"May be?" remarked the black, ushering him into the house. "No can say."

"What's that?" asked Bill.

Awati smiled until his teeth fairly glistened, then he pointed to a crown of paradise plumes hanging on the wall.

"Awati, American," he declared proudly. "Massa Bill—him Sambio."

THE END

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BILLY SMITH—SECRET SERVICE ACE

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BILLY SMITH SECRET SERVICE ACE

CHAPTER I

SPECIAL ORDERS

"I HAVE a wire here, Smith, that I want you to read," announced the admiral, and he passed a telegram across the desk. "It concerns you."

Billy took three steps forward, reached for the paper and ran his eyes quickly over the message.

"Rear Admiral George L. Clark, U.S.N.
Superintendent U. S. Naval Academy,
Annapolis, Maryland.

By order of the President, Midshipman William Smith, Third Class, is ordered to proceed, at once to Executive Offices of the President, Washington, D. C., and there to report to Commander John Smith, U. S. N. for special duty.

(Signed) A. B. WELLER,
Secretary to the President."

Bill laid the telegram on the desk and again stood rigidly at attention. His features betrayed no hint of the excitement he felt. Through the open windows of the Superintendent's office squads of fourth-year midshipmen could be seen at drill, and the warm spring breeze carried in the sharp commands of petty officers.

The admiral tapped the desk before him with the tip of a pencil. "I've been expecting something of this nature," he resumed, "and I take it that these orders are not exactly a surprise to you, Smith."

"No, sir. I had a letter from my father last week saying I might be called to Washington. He didn't explain the reason for it though."

"Naturally he wouldn't." The admiral swung around in his chair, faced the open windows. "Commander Smith, Naval Aide to the President, is your uncle, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir, my father's brother."

"And your father is Henry Smith, the explorer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me—how is it you happen to speak Arabic?"

This last came as a surprise to Bill. He was a lad who kept many things to himself, and had never told anyone at the Academy about his knowledge of that language.

"My mother died when I was a little chap," he replied, "and Dad went out to the Euphrates Valley with the Oxford Expedition. There was nobody to leave me with, so he took me along. We were out in Northern Arabia for four years, uncovering Carchemish, the ancient capital of the Hittite Empire. Naturally I learned to speak Kurdish and a number of the Arabian dialects."

"Mm-Phmm—" said the admiral, "—so that's the story? And later on you were out in New Guinea with your uncle, weren't you?—and helped him rescue your father from headhunters?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are also a licensed aviator?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think I see. . . ." The admiral spoke half to himself. "Yes, that's evidently it."

Billy was tingling to ask what "it" meant but Naval Academy discipline forbids a midshipman to question a superior officer, and the admiral's next words dashed his hopes.

"You've done well here," said that gentleman. "Pack up your things and catch the 12:17 for Washington. That gives you over an hour. . . . Here's your money, and a pass off the reservation." The admiral stood up and coming round the desk handed Bill an envelope. "Goodbye, Smith, and good luck," he said as they shook hands.

"Goodbye, and thank you, sir."

Bill saluted, turned on his heel and left the room.

Drill was over, and as Bill walked across the parade-ground in the bright sunlight, he noticed the new green of young leaves on the trees, the mellowed stone of the old buildings, and these things suddenly looked good to him. It was going to be hard to leave the old place, and the fellows he had lived with for the past year and a half. For the first time in his life Bill knew what it was to feel homesick.

As he hurried up the path toward his dormitory, he realized that there was not even time to say goodbye to his classmates. Hard on a fellow,—but then, there was the job awaiting him. He admitted to himself that these orders had him going —excited his curiosity to its highest pitch. Whatever he was to do, it must be important or the President would not have had a hand in it.

Once in his room, he stuffed his few belongings into a seabag and suitcase and half an hour later was hurrying across the reservation with one on his shoulder and the other in his free hand.

At the gates he handed his pass to the Chief Petty Officer on duty and was lucky enough to find a dilapidated taxi waiting.

"The railroad station," he called out as he swung himself and his luggage aboard, "—and step on it, haven't much time."

The ancient darkey at the wheel didn't answer

but the way the old bus shot ahead and the way they turned the next corner on high showed that he had understood.

As it was, Bill found he had time and to spare at the station, and as he boarded the train and chose his seat, he wondered when he would see the old red brick city again.

At Baltimore he had to change. But it gave him time to get a quick lunch in the station restaurant between trains and an hour later he was in Washington, bowling down Pennsylvania Avenue in another taxi. As the car pulled up before the Executive Offices of the President, his heart was thumping with excitement but he nonchalantly overpaid the driver, and carrying his seabag and suitcase, entered the building.

It was evident that he was expected, for upon giving his name to the doorman, that functionary relieved him of his luggage and piloted him down a long hall to a door where he saw in gold letters on the ground glass panel, "Commander John Smith." The man knocked and opening the door stepped aside for Bill to enter.

A naval officer was seated at a large desk across the room. Beside him lounged a man in civilian clothes. There was a strong resemblance between the two, although the officer's hair was brown while the civilian's was a tawny red. Big-boned and heavy-shouldered, both had the wind-and-sun-

burned look that is usual with outdoor men. They looked up from the map they were so intently studying as Billy walked in.

"Well, here he is," boomed the naval officer, "—here's the man now!"

"Hello, son," greeted the civilian—"glad to see you, old fella."

"Hello, dad," returned Bill, running forward to be caught in a bear hug by his father, "Gosh! I sure am glad to see you—and you, too, Uncle Jack," he added a moment later as the officer grasped his hand. It was typical of the lad's training that although he was bursting with pent-up curiosity as to the reason for his journey to Washington, his removal from Annapolis, he asked no questions.

"Heave yourself into that chair, Bill," suggested Commander Smith. "How'd you leave things at Crabtown?"

"Rather hurriedly," replied his nephew with a grin. "I don't know how the Academy will stand it."

"Never kid your superior officer," laughed his uncle, "—yes, I suppose it was a bit of a surprise. . . ."

"Don't stall him off, Jack," cut in Mr. Smith. "Feel kind of beam ends up, don't you, Bill?"

"You said it, dad. Naturally I'm crazy to know why I was sent for."

Mr. Smith nodded and then sought his brother's glance. "You start the ball, Jack," he decreed, "and I'll supply details later."

Commander Smith picked up a well-used briar pipe from his desk, rubbed the bowl speculatively between his palms for a moment, then filled it from a tobacco jar beside him, lit the pipe and after inhaling several puffs of pungent smoke, commenced to talk.

"Billy," he began, "you must understand first of all that what I say to you is in strict confidence. It is a government matter of the highest importance and must go no further. There are only five men in this country who know anything about it and should the facts leak out, the United States would be brought into serious complications with a friendly foreign power."

"I understand," said Bill. "You can trust me to keep my mouth shut."

"I know that, boy. Now here's the story. Some months ago a certain Dr. Parker, an archaeologist and eastern traveler, had an interview with the president of a world famous oil company in New York City. For the past two years Dr. Parker had been traveling in the Arabian hinterland—that enormous unmapped territory lying east of the kingdom of Hejaz known as the Great Arabian Desert. To make a short story long—after being captured by natives and forced to live with them,

he escaped and was able to work his way north into Transjordania. He was in pretty bad shape when he arrived at Damascus, but after resting there took a ship from Beirut and eventually turned up in New York."

The Commander stopped and puffed at his pipe.

"Now comes the interesting part," he went on. "Dr. Parker brought back with him a story of hitherto undiscovered oil wells in the Arabian desert; and what interested the president of the American oil company even more—samples of that oil. Personally, I know little about oil, but these New York people thought so much of it that they secretly fitted out an expedition with Dr. Parker in charge to locate and treat with the proper parties for the purchase of the wells. The Parker expedition disappeared into the Syrian desert enroute south and eastward eight months ago, and no word had come from them until last week. This was in the form of a cable sent by the United States Consul at Jedda, the port of Mecca on the Red Sea. It stated that the Arab body-servant of Dr. Parker had arrived there ill and wounded. That the man bore word from Dr. Parker saying that the expedition had been surrounded somewhere in the Arabian hinterland and begged the Oil Company to send assistance at the earliest possible moment. The cable message was in the most guarded language but two things in it

were decidedly clear: that unless help came shortly the Parker expedition would be wiped out—and, now we come to the reason for all this hush business: that message also stated that another power had learned of those oil wells and had a very good chance of getting them unless help came to the Americans."

"The French," interrupted Mr. Smith, "are very much interested in that part of the world at the present time, Bill."

"And," supplemented his brother, "the United States and France are on the friendliest of terms; so this government cannot fight a French expedition even in the heart of Arabia without all sorts of complications. The oil company of course got busy pulling wires down here in Washington, but officially Washington can do nothing. However, Bill, your father was called into conference as an authority on Arabia. He suggested another expedition be secretly fitted out by the company at once —and that while that expedition is following Mr. Parker's trail into the desert, you and he take a more direct route. In other words, you two will sail tomorrow for Naples. There you will be met by an oil company boat which will land you at Port Sudan on the African side of the Red Sea. . . . Take a look at this map, Bill. Jedda, the place where the cable was sent from, is across the Red Sea and slightly to the north of Port Sudan, you see."

"Yes, I see." Billy studied the map for some minutes.

Then, "The oil company have had better than a week to get that second expedition ready," he remarked. "Why can't they step on it a bit and ship along with us?"

Mr. Smith smiled. "Bill, the second expedition sailed two days ago. But they must go the long way round via Beirut and Damascus."

"Why?"

"Because, young man,—you ought to know the reason—Hejaz is a kingdom closed to foreigners. Mecca, the holiest city of the Mohammedan world, is the capital. All European nations recognize this ban. And no foreign expedition would be allowed to cross the kingdom; in order to reach the unknown territory beyond, one must cross Transjordania to the north as Parker did and work south through the Syrian and Great Arabian Deserts. The second expedition goes that way, via Beirut and Damascus, as I've said. You and I, Bill, will take the short cut—across Hejaz."

"And we're shipping to Port Sudan across the Red Sea so as not to advertise the fact?" queried Bill.

"Just so—of course if we are caught, this country can do nothing and things will be mighty unpleasant."

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean, lad, that for a Christian the penalty of trespassing in Hejaz is death. . . . Still keen on the adventure?"

"If you're willing to chance it, dad, I am."

"Good fella."

"But how can we be of help—just two of us?"

"You leave that to older heads than yours," broke in the Commander. "Plans have been formed here in Washington that your father may not tell even you at present."

"Of course I'm wild to go," declared Billy, "but why was I chosen?"

"Because," his father smiled, "I trust you, son —you speak Arabic, and you can drive an airplane!"

"Gosh!" exploded Bill. "A plane!—We'll sure make it then."

"Don't be too sure," warned Mr. Smith, "it will be a ticklish job at best. Hejaz does not permit airplanes. They're a Christian abomination, and would pollute the air of that holy land!"

"Then we'll sure do some polluting," laughed Bill.

Mr. Smith shook his head, though there was a twinkle in his eye. "It is the opinion of the President of the United States that we have about one chance in a thousand of getting through."

"And yet you're taking it, dad. Well, if any man can do it, you will. That isn't worrying me just

now. What I want to know is—what sort of a boat have I got to fly?"

Commander Smith stood up. "Your plane is crated and aboard our steamer at New York," he announced. "But if you'd like to see her sister ship we'll run down to Antacosta in my car—how about it?"

"Great!" declared Bill and caught up his cap.

CHAPTER II

EAST OF SUEZ

BILLY glanced upward as the three reached the sidewalk outside the Executive Offices.

"If I had the choosing to do," he announced, pointing toward an airplane that was circling above the White House, "that's the bus I'd pick."

"I hope your judgment is better than your English," sighed his father, as he and the Commander followed Billy's gaze skyward. "What is that plane?"

"A Fokker Universal—there isn't a better bus made for the type of work we want to do."

"What do you know about her?"

"Plenty: she's a monoplane as you can see, dad —a cabin type that can be mounted either on wheels or on pontoons for alighting on water, and on skis for snow and ice. She will carry a pilot, four passengers and 80 pounds of baggage 600 miles without refueling. The wings are of semi-cantilever form built in one piece 47 feet long, wood rib construction covered with veneer instead of fabric. The fuselage is of steel tubing. Two fuel tanks, have a total capacity of 78 gallons and there are two entirely separate pipe lines, provided with

shut-off cocks within reach of the pilot. The pilot's compartment is of the open cockpit type; stick control and rudder pedals of the straight-pull-swinging type are fitted. All pulleys are—"

"All right, son—I'll take your word for it. You seem to know something about that plane, got it down pat, haven't you?"

"How about performance with a full load?" asked the Commander, whose gold wings proclaimed him a flyer.

Although the plane had disappeared the three remained standing by the side of the waiting automobile.

"High speed—118 miles an hour," said Bill, "—cruising speed (1500 R.P.M.; 115 H.P.)—95 m.p.h. Landing speed—"

"That—will—do! This isn't a memory test," laughed his uncle. "Come on, let's shove off! No need to drive to Antacosta—that plane we just saw is a sister ship of the one you will use in Arabia, Bill. You seem pretty well up on what she is and what she will do. How about it? Are you satisfied?"

Billy beamed. "That's wonderful!" he cried. "We couldn't have a better plane for the job. But where are we off to now?"

"We've got to get you some civilian clothes and other things," announced his father, seating himself in the car. "Remember, we leave for New York on the 5:03. Our ship sails at midnight."

It was a thoroughly tired lad who dropped into his bunk that night on the Italian liner, steaming slowly through the Narrows and down New York's Lower Bay.

When they came aboard, the captain had offered the courtesy of the bridge to Mr. Smith and his son, having known the famous explorer for some years. Bill, therefore, had insisted on remaining topside to watch the pilot navigate the big ship down the intricacies of the Ambrose Channel.

"Gosh," he murmured sleepily, as he relaxed his weary bones, "what a day! Who'd thought this morning when reveille blew at the Academy, that tonight I'd be aboard a liner bound for Arabia!"

The voyage across the Atlantic was a pleasant one, made particularly so by the attentions of the Italian captain and the almost perfect weather. The ship put in at Gibraltar for a few hours and most of the passengers, the Smiths included, took advantage of it to stretch their legs ashore.

Some days later they steamed into the beautiful harbor of Naples, and Bill got his first sight of Vesuvius' smoke-capped cone. Here the Smiths bade farewell to the captain and their steamer acquaintances. On the quay they were met by a representative of the oil company who piloted them along the waterfront to where a motor launch awaited their coming. He saw that their baggage was put aboard and wished them Godspeed, re-

maining ashore himself to superintend the transport of the crated airplane from the Italian liner.

"There she is, without doubt, Bill," commented Mr. Smith as the launch skimmed the deep blue water of the harbor. "That tanker a point off the starboard bow bears the house flag of the oil company—can you make out her name?"

"Dolphin, I think." Bill shaded his eyes with his hand. "Yes, it's Dolphin, all right. I reckon our quarters aboard will be anything but luxurious by the looks of her."

"Well, as long as she gets us and the plane down to Port Sudan without waste of time," remarked his father, "—a hammock apiece at night will be all the quarters we'll need."

"Right, dad; and I'll bet by the time we get into the Red Sea we won't care to go below any oftener than necessary. I can smell the oil from here. . . ."

Contrary to their fears, the Smiths found themselves allotted a comfortable cabin aboard the Dolphin. The ship weighed anchor an hour after their arrival, transfer of the plane having been accomplished successfully within that time.

Billy and his father were relieved to learn that the oil company representatives had arranged with two expert airplane men, a construction engineer and mechanic from one of the Fokker European plants, to board the tanker at Naples.

"Gee, dad, those oil company guys know what

they're doing, all right. I was wondering how on earth we were going to uncrate and assemble that bus at Port Sudan with probably unskilled native labor!"

Mr. Smith smiled. "They're going to do everything *they* can do; it will be up to us to do the rest!"

The temperature rose steadily as they neared Port Said, at the Mediterranean end of the Suez Canal. The Dolphin's passengers were glad to leave their hot, stuffy cabins for hammocks swung on deck at night.

This was not unknown territory to Bill who had passed through the Canal on his way to and from New Guinea a couple of years before. But as the tanker slowly steamed between the narrow sandy banks southward toward Suez, he watched with renewed interest the native camel drivers urging their unwilling beasts along the desert's rim. Except for a few native huts and houses of the canal workers, nothing could be seen but the rolling sand prairies reaching on and out to a treeless horizon.

The heat became intense as they went on. The rank stench of oil below decks was nauseating, and the Smiths, father and son, were glad to follow their captain's example and discard western clothing for the linen suits of the tropics.

Past Suez, they steamed on down the Red Sea. "The Red Sea is a good name for it," exclaimed Bill as they sat on deck, at dinner, one night—

"Even the wind down here is red hot. Oh, boy! what wouldn't I give for an ice cream soda!"

"Which reminds me," grumbled the chief engineer, "our ice machine has gone fluey and until I can get new parts, we're out of luck."

"It's my opinion," Mr. Smith smiled, "that Billy and I are in for hotter times than this before we reach the land of ice machines again."

The burning hot days and stuffy nights passed slowly until one morning Port Sudan came into sight. So far as they could make out it was merely a straggling line of houses and mud huts on the edge of the Nubian Desert.

"That's about the most unattractive berg I've ever seen," was Bill's comment as he stared at the shore line through the captain's glasses. Presently the tanker dropped anchor half a mile out in the roadstead and the hot shore wind carried to them that indescribable odor of the east, familiar to every traveler in the Orient.

Here again the oil company had been at work and presently a barge put off from shore. As soon as she was moored to the side of the ship, the work of transferring the crated airplane began.

Two hours later the party came ashore, and while the aircraft men started the work of uncrating and assembling the Fokker, Bill and his father held a conference with the American consul from

Jedda who had sailed across to Port Sudan to see them.

At Consul Perkins' suggestion they had walked up the beach to Port Sudan's one and only hotel—a dirty, smelly place run by a still dirtier Italian.

"Let's park on the veranda," proposed Billy. "I'm gradually getting used to smells, but I can't see going inside this dump and gassing ourselves to death before we get started on our trip!"

"I would suggest," began Consul Perkins when they had pulled three rickety chairs into the shade, "that you, Mr. Smith, and your son, secure a tent and camp on the beach until your plane is ready for departure. I had a most uncomfortable time in this hotel last night. With all due respect to you gentlemen I'll be glad to get away from Port Sudan this afternoon. Jedda is not New York, but there at least one may find approximate comfort."

Mr. Smith nodded assent to the proposal offered by this red-faced pompous little man.

"We'll follow your suggestion, Consul. We've a tent we're taking into the desert. Although we're not planning for personal comfort just now when men's lives hang in the balance—eh, son?"

"Yes, sir," returned Billy. "I'd be perfectly happy if it weren't for the smells and the bugs. . . ."

"Fine," his father grinned. Then, turning to the Consul, "now for your news, sir; I trust it is good news."

"Some good, but mostly bad, Mr. Smith. In the first place, Zeid, the young Bedouin who got through to me at Jedda, is dying. He won't last more than a few days at most. He was terribly wounded. After delivering the message from Dr. Parker which I cabled, he sank into a coma. Three days ago when he regained consciousness, I told him that I was about to go over to Port Sudan to meet the leader of the relief expedition and asked him for further information regarding the location of Dr. Parker's party in the desert. You will recall that Dr. Parker wrote that Zeid would give us that information—evidently fearing a written message might get into enemy hands. The trouble is, that now Zeid refuses to divulge his secret to anyone but you. 'The leader must come to me,' he says, 'it is Allah's will.' "

"Which means," Mr. Smith interrupted, "that I must cross to Jedda."

"Yes," agreed the Consul, "a practically impossible situation, to put it mildly."

"You mean—?"

"I mean, sir, that the town is overrun with spies in the pay of the King of Hejaz. It was impossible to send that cable without the Hejaz government getting wind of it. They certainly have spies here in Port Sudan—if you fly to Jedda and visit Zeid in my house . . . well, they will put two and two together—and they are quite sharp enough to see

that that makes four! If they should capture you, your plane, of course, would be confiscated, and the best you and your son could hope for is deportation. That, however, might stir up international complications—most probably it would be a knife in the back. . . . Dear me, I really don't know what to do about it."

For the first time the little man dropped his air of pomposity. He mopped his hot face with a large handkerchief. It was plain the consul was worried; he took no pains to hide it.

"How would it be if I sailed this afternoon with the consul?" Bill suggested. "In native costume I could pass as a servant."

"I'm afraid that's no good, lad," his father's tone was kindly. "In the first place, Arab spies would spot you before you got aboard, and even if you were able to evade their suspicions, when you arrived at Mr. Perkins' home Zeid would tell you nothing. It is to me he wants to talk—you see?"

For fully five minutes no one spoke. Then, Mr. Smith, who had risen and was pacing up and down, came back to them.

"When will you arrive in Jedda, Mr. Perkins?" he asked.

"Some time late tomorrow afternoon—it's about a two hundred mile run across the Red Sea."

"Good—: now then, are there any bays or in-

lets up or down the coast within ten or twelve miles of Jedda?"

"I see your point," replied the consul. "You suggest flying across the Red Sea, then plan to park your plane under cover of darkness. . . . Not a chance of success that way, I fear. The coast is flat and well patroled by Arab horsemen. You'd never get through to Jedda. Not only that—the noise of your motor would be heard for miles around these still nights. You'd only land to be collared at once by a patrol."

"How about landing some miles out at sea?" suggested Mr. Smith. "We could carry a small boat with us—moor the plane and row ashore."

"No—" the consul shook his head. "The shore line for miles is too well guarded. And if you should be able to evade those men there is no possible way you could enter the city without a pass."

For nearly ten minutes the three sat silently staring at the blue of the sea and the shipping of the sun-drenched roadstead. Each was wrapped in thought, groping blindly to solve the vital problem which confronted them.

Suddenly Billy sprang to his feet with a shout. "I really believe I've got it," he cried. "Yes, I'm sure if we take proper precautions it will work."

"Then for heaven's sake, let's hear your plan," ejaculated his father. "We certainly need one badly enough. Come on—let's have it."

CHAPTER III

CAPTURED

BILL resumed his seat and turned toward Consul Perkins.

"Didn't you come across in that big motor launch that lies moored a couple of hundred yards offshore?" he asked.

"The *Nona?* Yes—she belongs to me."

"Fine!" chirruped Bill. "Then the crew are your own men: can they be trusted, sir?"

"I believe so—although one can't always count on Arabs."

"But a substantial tip would close their mouths for the time being?"

"They're a greedy lot—yes, I feel sure I could buy their silence, if that is what you have in mind."

"Great—my plan of getting Dad and myself into Jedda so that we can listen to Zeid's story is this: I propose that you and your crew start back in the *Nona* tomorrow morning. Arrange your speed so as to arrive about twenty miles off Jedda at ten tomorrow night. Wait there until we pick you up with the plane. The *Nona* can show two red lights over her stern, one above the other, so we can make no mistake .We will shove off tomorrow

after dark—come down near the *Nona* and moor to a sea-anchor. Both Dad and I will be dressed as Arabs. We'll change places with two of your men aboard the *Nona* who can wait on the plane until we return from Jedda. . . . Now, what do *you* think of my plan?" Bill eagerly inquired.

"Why, it sounds good to me, Bill," replied his father, smiling in approval. "I really believe you've hit the bulls-eye. Of course there's a lot of detail to be arranged, but with luck we have a good chance of succeeding. What do you think about it, Consul?"

Mr. Perkins' red face still bore its gloomy frown. "The plan has merit," he admitted, "but it won't be so easy to fool the port authorities at Jedda. They are terribly strict and if they should see through your disguise—well, you'll simply disappear—and I'll be let in for a peck of trouble. . . . However, trouble is the most part of a Consul's job! But I must say that no matter how carefully you work out the details, Billy's plan is terribly risky."

"In order to succeed in this venture," Mr. Smith's tone was firm, "—both Billy and I are bound to encounter all kinds of risk. And it is only by meeting them with our eyes open and surmounting them that we shall eventually accomplish the job. You must remember, Consul, that the lives of a number of people are at stake, not to mention

most important trade concessions for our country. I admit that Bill's plan is not risk-proof; but it's the best we have at hand, and I think we can make it go."

"Now, son," he commanded briskly, "beat it down the beach and give those men a hand with the plane. I can see they've got most of the uncrating done by now. We've got a tough job ahead to get everything ready to start tomorrow night. As soon as I finish making arrangements with the Consul, I'll pitch in myself."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Bill, and with a wave of his hand, he ran down the veranda steps and made off along the beach.

A quarter mile down the sand from the hotel, Bill found the Fokker men had pitched camp. With the help of native labor they had finished most of the uncrating and were beginning to assemble the various parts of the big plane.

Early in the afternoon, Mr. Smith joined them.

"Well, I've fixed things up with the Consul," he said to Billy. "But Mr. Perkins is much perturbed over the whole matter. I suggested he take a siesta while I'm here, helping you."

"I guess he's scared to death," grinned Bill. "All I can say is, it's just too bad! As you can see, we're making progress, dad. If you'll go over there and superintend those natives who are uncrating the

wing sections and see they don't smash anything, you'll be a big help."

Throughout the long afternoon Billy, his father and the two mechanics worked with the natives they had hired, stripped to the waist. The tropic sun beat down on them mercilessly. There was little or no breeze to alleviate the terrific heat. Nevertheless, the work of uncrating the wings, hull, motor and various parts progressed rapidly. By six o'clock everybody was ready to knock off for supper.

A picnic meal of sandwiches and tea had been sent over from the hotel and the four white men sat on boxes in one of the tents that had been put up on the beach.

"I've arranged for a lot of flares, dad," said Billy, appreciatively munching his ham sandwich, "—there's no moon tonight and we'll need their light when we start assembling the plane."

"Those lights will serve a double purpose," Mr. Smith announced seriously. "You chaps may not have noticed but there are a number of men hanging about here—pretty tough customers, I should say. I don't like the look of them. They've been trying to talk to our workmen, though they shut up tight whenever one of us is nearby. I suspect that Hejaz has somehow got wind of our intentions and we're in for trouble tonight."

"I saw them, too, sir," declared one of the Fok-

ker men, "it looks pretty bad if your suspicions are correct."

"It does that," agreed Mr. Smith. "And if you fellows can spare them I'll take five men and place them as sentries along this part of the beach. I'll see to it they patrol their beats properly and in that way we shall be able to keep the spies out."

"That's a swell idea, dad," commented Billy. "We can certainly spare the men—we've got to!"

The meal was quickly finished and the four men got back to work again. While the business of assembling the plane went on Mr. Smith posted his sentries and kept a watchful eye on them. He had armed them with rifles from the small but complete arsenal which formed a necessary part of the expedition's equipment. Several times during the evening the men were forced to threaten natives who tried to come within the lines.

At eleven o'clock work on the Fokker was stopped for the night, and the Smiths and their two assistants held an informal conference.

"We'll have to patrol the beach all night," declared Smith Senior, "those men out there are bent on mischief. Our workmen will have to be divided into watches. Sunrise tomorrow is a few minutes before five—each of us will take a watch with the men we have been working with—an hour and a half apiece will do the trick. I'll go on duty with my gang until twelve-thirty when I'll

call Bill. Bill, you call Prager at two and Prager will call Van Laar at three-thirty. At five we'll breakfast and start the day's work. Bill and I can share one tent—you two men the other. Now off to bed with you. It's been a hard day, and we've another coming tomorrow."

Bill curled up on a pile of blankets and fell into a deep sleep immediately. It seemed to him that he had been sleeping less than no time when he heard his father's voice.

"Twelve-thirty and time you started your watch," called Mr. Smith from the doorway of the tent.

Bill got up and stretched. "Any trouble?" he asked.

"Nothing to speak of, son—but they're skulking 'round, and you'd better keep your eye out for mischief!"

"Aye, aye, sir—just as soon as I can prop my winkers open—Gee whiz! I'm sleepy!"

Upon leaving the tent he found that his father had awakened and posted the next watch, so after giving the patrol the once-over, he made his way over to where the Fokker's fuselage rested on a seaplane cradle. Nearby lay her wings ready for assemblage in the morning. The nightflares, dying down, cast strange flickering shadows over the piles of material scattered along the beach. Overhead, the Southern Cross, scintillating like a jew-

eled emblem on the bosom of the black velvet night. Bill fixed his gaze in an attempt to pierce the gloom which lay beyond the fading light of the flares; he was sure there was nothing—and yet, above the lapping of the waves on the sand he fancied he could hear a secret rustling, some stealthy movement in the deep shadow. . . .

Then suddenly, Bill laughed, aloud.

"Golly!" he muttered to himself, "this place sure has me going—I'm 'seeing things' now!"

He turned, and stooped over the open box which contained the extra flares. Without warning, he found himself seized from behind and a bag thrust over his head before he could draw breath. In vain he struggled but his arms had been caught in a grip of steel and bound to his sides beneath the bag. Then his muffled cries were silenced by a cloth knotted about his face and throat. Furious, half-strangled, he kicked and pulled his body about in one wild effort to get free. But they were too many, and a moment later he was dragged across the beach and thrown over the cropper of a horse and lay dangling there, inert and helpless. A man sprang upon the horse's back behind him, he heard a muffled chorus of confused cries—and they were off.

Bill suffered agonies with each jolt, as the horse cantered across the sands. Fortunately, this part of the journey was soon over. It seemed to Bill

that they had been traveling about twenty minutes when the horse was pulled back on his haunches and stopped short. Bill was then lifted none too carefully to the ground where the bag which had almost asphyxiated him was pulled off his head. Next, the lashings which bound his ankles were cut, although his wrists remained tied as securely as if they were handcuffed.

As he had supposed, Bill now saw that his captors were Arabs, three in all, two of whom had dismounted, leaving their horses in the hands of the third who rode away with them. Burly fellows they were, tall and fierce-looking, attired in disreputable garments more drab than white.

"Brigands, by heck!" thought Bill, "—hired by Hejaz, of course."

While he stood there in the cool night air, his brain began to clear and he realized that he again stood on the seashore. Then, as he gingerly stretched his numbed limbs, an Arab stepped to each side of him, seized his arms and ran him down to the water. Here a dinghy had been pulled up on the pebbly shingle of a small cove.

"Get into the stern and keep quiet or it will be the worse for you!" The tallest of the Arabs, who seemed to be the leader, growled menacingly at Bill, and brandished before him an ugly looking crescent of steel.

As he climbed over the thwarts the young

American realized that this was indeed a plot inspired by the King of Hejaz who also bears the title of Grand Shereef of Mecca, for the man had spoken in the Arabian dialect used by natives of that part of Arabia.

The Arabs followed him aboard, and while one of them got out a pair of oars and started to pull for the mouth of the cove, the man who had first spoken to him, told Bill what would happen to him if he refused to obey orders or tried to escape.

When they reached the cove's narrow entrance, where date palms swayed almost meeting across the channel, Bill saw that a stiff breeze had sprung up. Inasmuch as the wind was blowing on shore and the rowboat was pulling into the teeth of it, the talkative Arab grabbed another pair of oars and gave his companion a helping hand, but kept his knife and a murderous-looking revolver within easy reach on the thwart beside him.

A small native craft, her mast stepped back almost amidships, strained at her anchorage in the choppy sea a few hundred yards offshore. This was evidently the goal for which Bill's captors aimed. His gaze intent on the vessel, Bill's thoughts turned back to the plane and the camp on the beach. He wondered whether the Shereef's men had been able to damage the plane—whether there had been a fight and if anyone had been hurt. . . . In all probability the three men who had made

off with him were only a part of the attacking force for he felt sure that his capture was incidental to the wrecking of the plane and putting an end to the Smith expedition.

His bruised body ached, and he felt blue and discouraged. An Arab prison if nothing worse awaited him across the Red Sea. He was certain that the horsemen had escaped unobserved by his father and the men; even if they had been able to beat off the attacking party they had no means of locating him. Without doubt they would scour the African desert behind Port Sudan while he would be sailing across the sea to Asia. There could be no chance of outside help in his predicament.

Billy groaned softly to himself.

"Well, if I'm going to get out of this mess, I'll have to play a lone hand, that's sure. . . ."

The dinghy nosed the side of the vessel and he was roughly helped aboard. He saw that she was a small craft of a couple of tons burden. A deck ran aft from the bow to the single mast. Aft of this was an open cockpit with a centerboard running fore and aft and a low thwart at the stern.

"Go forward and sit down," growled the man who had given him a hand aboard.

Billy obediently made his way to a place near the bow where he watched while the dinghy was made fast to a stern bolt, the anchor raised and rakish lateen sail run up the mast. (This type of sail is triangular and is extended by a long yard which

is slung to the low mast at an angle of about forty-five degrees.) Bill marveled how close she was able to sail into the wind with the aid of her centerboard.

For several minutes he lay there watching the black choppy sea splash over her forequarter.

Then the germ of a plan entered his mind.

Cautiously he peered aft. Both men were busy: the one with the tiller, the other tending sheet. Neither was paying the slightest attention to him. Few Arabs can swim, Bill had heard. But the fact that his wrists were bound before him with a length of stout rope was sufficient evidence that there was no chance of escape from the vessel.

Billy got unsteadily to his feet. The little ship was pitching heavily. Astern, he could see the dark shoreline, half a mile away; all about him an angry sea was buffeted by the wind. He knew he could not hope to swim more than a hundred yards or so in such water with his hands bound.

Still, he had a plan. But if this plan failed, the Arabian expedition would end for him—here and now.

"Goodbye and good luck to you—" he shouted, his voice carrying well on the wind to the two men aft. "Next time you catch a white man, tie his legs. I don't need my hands for swimming. . . ."

Then while the Arabs gazed openmouthed, he dove over the low bulwark and disappeared beneath the waves.

CHAPTER IV

A BATH AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As the water closed over him Bill curved his back and came up almost immediately. He saw the native craft head into the wind and remain almost stationary. This was just what he had been banking on, so letting his legs drop, he trod water. Although he knew the Arabs were on the lookout, he had no fear that they could locate him. The night was far too dark and the sea too choppy for them to make out a small object on its surface at that distance. If they put about and sailed for shore he was lost—but Bill remembered and was counting on the shallow water that extends a mile or so out from the African shore of the Red Sea. He prayed she would drop her anchor, and presently he gave a gasp of relief.

There came a splash off her port bow and Bill knew that although his troubles were by no means over, his first hope was realized.

"Thank the Lord for *that* break!" he said to himself, then turned on his back and struck out with his legs in the ship's direction, but took a course that would bring him some twenty or thirty yards off her port side.

When Bill reached a point in the water off the ship's port bow, he struck out directly for her. A few minutes later he reached the anchor rope and grasped it tightly. In spite of his lacerated wrists he managed to pull himself up until his eyes were on a level with the top of the low bulwarks.

The lateen sail had been lowered and the two men were making the ship secure, arguing in loud voices the while.

"I tell you—" shouted the fellow who had drawn a knife on Bill, "we can't get him any other way. We'd be sure to pass him, in the ship. In the dinghy we have a chance. Remember, our orders were to bring either the son or the father to the Holy City alive."

"But I can't see—" expostulated the other.

"That's just it . . ." cut in the first man, "from this deck neither of us can see much on a dark night like this. In the dinghy we'll be almost level with the water. Hurry and furl that sail! By Allah! the Shereef will cut our throats with his own holy hand if the lad gets ashore and escapes us."

Bill could not hear the other man's reply, but presently saw him pull in on the dinghy's painter. Then they went over the side and he could just follow them through the gloom, taking a zigzag course for shore.

Waiting until he was certain they had rowed some distance from the ship, Bill clambered over

the bulwark, and collapsed in exhaustion on the heaving deck. He lay there for fully five minutes —the strain of hanging on to the anchor rope had been almost too much for him.

At last he stood up and gazed aft. Halfway to shore he glimpsed the dinghy tossing through the dark water, half obscured by the flying scud.

"Gee," he exulted, "the old plan worked, all right!—Now to business again!"

His next job was to find a knife or some sharp instrument with which to cut the cord about his wrists. A thorough search brought nothing better than a rusty bailing tin to light. Seating himself on the stern thwart he placed the can between his knees and sawed away on its jagged edge. He narrowly missed cutting himself several times, but at last he was free. After several minutes of massage to get the numbness out of his wrists, he lashed the tiller to keep the ship's head on to the wind as soon as she got steerage way. Then he made ready the oddly shaped sail for hoisting, and ran forward.

To raise the anchor without assistance proved no easy job, but at last he was able to hook one of the flukes over the bulwark and there he let it lie.

"Not such a seagoin' job," he muttered, "but plenty good enough when time's short and the old tub's head is falling away every split second!"

With the anchor temporarily secured, Bill ran aft where he loosed the tiller. Then with a leg

thrown over it to keep the ship steady, he reached for the reefed sail's single halyard and ran the lateen smartly up the stumpy mast. After securing the halyard to a cleat on the decking, he pulled in the sheet and pointing the ship's head south, went bowling along closehauled on a starboard tack, parallel with the coastline.

Then like the well-trained seaman he was, Bill again lashed the tiller fast and went forward. First he dragged the anchor aboard, then coiled the loose ropes, and after making things generally shipshape he returned to his place at the tiller once more.

"And that's that," Bill commented to the ship and the waves and the flying scud. . . . "Outside of a few bruises and a wetting I'm not so badly off. There's satisfaction in knowing that His Majesty the King is on to our little venture. I wonder whether he *will* cut the throats of those two unlucky subjects of his?"

The sun was sending its sizzling hot rays over the horizon when Bill sailed his lateen rigged craft into the roadstead of Port Sudan. The wind which had been blowing half a gale during the night had died down, giving the small vessel little more than steerageway. At a point some fifty yards offshore and directly opposite the camp of the Smith expedition, he dropped anchor.

"Even though the old tub is flatbottomed there's

too much surf to beach her this morning," Bill said to himself as he lowered the sail and secured his ship. "There's nothing for it but another swim before breakfast. And oh boy! how I can murder some honest-to-goodness chow! Thank heaven the water down in this part of the world is warm. . . ."

A dive over the side—and presently he waded ashore. The native workmen were cooking breakfast over their fires on the sand and the smell of the food was tantalizing. But only stopping to wring some of the seawater out of his bedraggled linen trousers, he walked swiftly up the beach to the tent he had shared with his father.

"Hello, everybody!" he called gaily, "Any chow left for a famished seaman?"

Three haggard white men looked up from a desultory breakfast.

"*Billy!*" cried his father, jumping up and catching him in a bearlike hug. "Where in this confounded Nubian desert did you come from?"

"Out of the Red Sea, Dad," grinned his son. "I might add that it's very wet this morning—and I'm mighty glad to be back."

"And you can bet we're glad to see you, sir," said Prager, while Van Laar nodded approval as he wrung Bill's hand.

"My boy, we've been terribly worried—thank God you are safe—" Mr. Smith said gravely, a suspicious tremor in his voice.

"Gee, Dad, I had a swell time," cut in Bill, embarrassed by his father's obvious emotion. "But while I'm changing into dry togs, tell me what happened after I got scragged—were those devils able to damage anything?"

"No, Bill—luckily one of the sentries saw you being dragged off, and set up a yell for help. Those fellows who got you had sneaked through the lines before the general attack, so we were at least halfway ready for them. When they saw we were not to be taken by surprise, and that they were getting more fighting than glory, the whole gang drew off and disappeared into the dunes."

"It was when we answered the sentry's call that they swooped down on us—and not until after the fray was over did we discover that you'd been carried off—since then we've scoured the desert for you . . ." his father explained.

"But what happened to you? How did you manage to escape?" questioned the others eagerly.

"Well, it's a long story. . . . I'll tell it as soon as I finish dressing and start on some of that breakfast. The main thing is I have found out that the whole attack was engineered by His Highness of Hejaz. How much they know I can't tell—but they're on to the fact that we are after Dr. Parker or I miss my guess."

"Humph! That *is* interesting," commented Mr.

Smith. "Sit down here and dig into the grub—then tell us all about it."

For half an hour Billy ate and recounted his adventures while the others gave his story close attention.

"That was sure smart work on your part, sir," Prager exclaimed when Bill had finished. "I shouldn't care to be in those Arabs' shoes when they report their failure to the Grand Shereef."

"I should say not—" Van Laar chuckled, "that was a mighty clever trick, Master Bill."

Billy flushed, and mumbled an unintelligible reply.

Mr. Smith cast a comprehending glance in Bill's direction and smiled. "Yes, the boy's got brains and he uses them in a pinch—but seriously, the important factors are that the plane is undamaged, and that we know definitely now what we're up against. However, I doubt that we'll have more trouble while we're on this side of the Red Sea. The less we say about the attack the better, especially to the consul when we meet him tonight. He's worrying enough as it is. We all need sleep, so we'll turn in for a couple of hours and get a well earned rest. The work on the plane is well under way, so I feel sure you can take a trial hop this afternoon, Bill. —Now to bed with you all—at once!"

CHAPTER V

THE TRIAL OF THE FOKKER

By five that afternoon the plane had been assembled and loaded and provisioned for the journey into the heart of unmapped Arabia.

"Gee, that's a neat job, dad," exclaimed Billy, as he surveyed with satisfaction the result of their labors, "—not an ounce of surplus material aboard!"

"Right you are, son," replied his father, "so far, so good, eh?"

Commander Smith had chosen for them this Fokker Universal primarily because the fuselage is laid out so as to provide the maximum unobstructed cabin space which can be divided into passenger and freight or baggage compartments, according to individual requirements. In this case the standard equipment of four comfortable passenger seats, with plenty of leg room, had been cut to two passenger seats. Behind these, a space for baggage and general supplies, while in the after part of the cabin extra fuel tanks had been installed which more than doubled the ordinary gasoline capacity —a highly necessary addition, for once they were in the desert, it would be impossible to refuel. The

ship had also been fitted with pontoons for use in crossing the Red Sea.

"I have arranged with the skipper of the *Dolphin,*" Mr. Smith told Bill, "to meet us at a point about thirty miles below Jedda and about twenty miles off-shore. She will be there sometime tomorrow morning."

"I noticed that she steamed out of the roadstead about the time Consul Perkins left in the *Nona,*" replied Bill. "What's the idea, dad?"

"Simply this, son. Instead of having to come back here in order to change our pontoons for landing gear, when we've finished our business at Jedda we'll fly out to the *Dolphin*—be hoisted aboard and do the work there."

"But how about our takeoff?"

"I thought I'd told you about the landing platform the *Dolphin* carried knocked-down in her hold? They will set it up on the way over and we can also take on extra fuel to make up for what we'll use in the meantime."

"It sounds easy, —BUT!" was Bill's sole comment. Then he added, "Sufficient unto the hop, though, so why worry?"

The Fokker had been assembled aboard a seaplane cradle which was attached by means of a heavy hawser to a small tractor; with one of the mechanics mounted on the tractor, the cradle or plane carrier was pulled slowly down the beach,

lumbering along on its heavy wheels to the water's edge. Here, at the Smiths' direction, the native workmen grasped the hawser and waded out, dragging the plane on its carrier behind them.

Seaplanes are only moored on the water in cases of necessity for their wide-spread wings act exactly like the sails of a boat. Even a gentle wind may cause the plane to break its moorings. To avoid being damaged, these craft, after alighting on the water are usually hauled ashore. Having no wheels of their own they are floated aboard the cradle or carrier so that they may be run up the incline of the beach and into the hangar—or, as in this case, brought down to the sea.

Billy and the mechanics were already aboard the Fokker and as the big plane floated clear of its carrier, Billy, in the pilot's seat, gradually widened the throttle. The hum of the propeller increased to a roar as they taxied gracefully along the water away from the shore, where Mr. Smith, the workmen and the crowd of interested natives were watching the take-off.

The bottom of a pontoon is so constructed that a wide tapering step makes its appearance slightly abaft the nose. As he speeded up the Fokker preparatory to the take-off, Billy pulled his stick sharply toward him, thereby jerking the heavy airbus onto its step. Now, instead of taxiing through the water they went skimming along, the

lower extremity of the step barely resting on the surface.

Once again her skipper "gave her the gun" and this time full strength. Their speed increased visibly. Then, accompanied by the roaring drone of the motor and its spinning propeller, the big plane rose swiftly into the air like a mammoth bird escaped from its cage.

As they climbed, Billy banked to port—that is, by pulling over his stick he inclined the airplane laterally so that his right or starboard wing lifted and the port wing sank—pointing her nose parallel to the beach.

Every flyer knows that one does not slow down a plane in the air in turning a corner as one does in a motor car: one banks; otherwise the plane skids and losing her flying speed forever, drops into a spin. With a bus as heavy as the type Bill was flying this is dangerous. It means an inevitable crash unless there is plenty of air beneath.

Billy found that in his plane the most perfect vision for the pilot had been provided. Seated ahead of the leading edge of the wing, the forward, right and left, overhead, downward and rear visions were entirely unobstructed. His sight to the rear of each side, under the wings also extended back over a capacious angle.

"This cockpit is well screened and it's comfortable, too," he said to the mechanic who was care-

fully checking up the instruments set in the dash forward.

"That's right, sir," replied the man as he continued his inspection. "And how do you like the straight pull swinging type of stick control and rudder pedals?"

"Nothing could be sweeter. Gosh! we've plenty of instruments aboard. Let's see, there's a tachometer, oil pressure gauge, oil thermometer and altimeter; and a compass, bank and turn indicator, airspeed indicator—not to mention the radio apparatus! We can't very well go wrong with all these gadgets, it's as easy as driving a baby-carriage!"

Below them, to port, lay the African desert, vast and mysterious in the last rays of the setting sun; on the other side the Red Sea stretched glittering on and out to a still horizon.

"This motor runs like a sewing-machine," volunteered the mechanic, "and all your instruments are registering 100%. There's nothing more I can do to her, sir."

"Then we'll beat it back to Port Sudan," declared the pilot, "there's still a lot of dunnage to be stowed before we take off tonight."

With an easy pressure of his right foot on the rudder pedal, Bill banked to starboard and ten minutes later nosed the Fokker down for a perfect cross-wind landing. Their mooring was soon picked

up and the big plane lay quietly on the smooth sea a couple of hundred yards offshore.

An hour later the sun sank behind the desert's rim, and the tropical night fell like a velvet mantle over land and sea.

By this time all preparations had been completed, and the last of the dunnage taken aboard the plane from a launch which carried Mr. Smith and the other airplane man out to her.

Again Billy took her off, and again ran the plane north along the African coast. For about fifty miles he kept her headed in the same direction, for it was no part of the plan to give an inkling of their destination to any adherents of the Kingdom of Hejaz who might be sojourning at Port Sudan.

Bill had shot her up until the altimeter on the dash registered five thousand feet; now he slightly lowered her nose, and took a northeasterly course out across the water, for Jedda lies considerably north of Port Sudan on the Asiatic shore. The Red Sea at this point is about one hundred and fifty miles wide.

The night was fine and clear, and although there was no moon, myriads of stars afforded a visibility that was excellent for night flying. Gradually, as their distance from the Asiatic shore decreased, Bill lowered their altitude until presently they were humming along a bare thousand feet above the water.

Then, suddenly Bill waved his hand and the other three, peering eagerly forward discerned two red lights twinkling on the ocean's bosom far ahead.

"Our friend, the Consul, hasn't disappointed us," remarked his father, and Bill, turning his head for the fraction of a second, was surprised at the change in Mr. Smith's appearance. Gone were the linens of the Occident, for the man beside him wore a kuffieh of white silk and gold embroidery held in place over his hair by an agal, two black woolen cords wrapped with silver and gold thread. His heavy black camel's hair robe or abba covered a snow-white undergarment fastened at the waist by a wide gold-brocaded belt in which he carried the curved sword of a prince of Mecca.

"I'd never have known you if you hadn't spoken!" declared Bill as he snapped his eyes front again and headed for the two red lights in a long, descending arc. "What with that get-up and the dark stain on your face, Grand Shereef Hussein, King of Hejaz, would welcome you as a long-lost brother, eh, dad?"

"I've got a Bedouin Arab costume for you, son," returned his parent, "—just as soon as we land by the launch you hop back here and I'll show you how to put it on."

"Right-o, dad. We'll be down in a minute. Grab that Very pistol and fire it down out of the port-

hole, please? That will give me all the light I need to land on a night like this. I could probably make out the water anyway; but it's deceptive and there's no use starting this trip with a crash!"

CHAPTER VI

ZEID'S MESSAGE

BILLY landed the plane safely near the waiting launch, thanks to the lights of the Very pistol.

He immediately donned the Bedouin costume his father had in readiness, stained his face, hands, arms and legs a deep brown, then applied a black dye to his hair and eyebrows. . . . Half an hour later two Arabs stepped from the plane into the launch which had pulled alongside.

Mr. Smith greeted the Consul in native dialect. "For the benefit of your men," he said in a low voice, "we'll talk Arabic, if you don't mind." Then louder. "Be good enough to order two of your servants aboard the plane, Consul."

The Consul spoke a few words and the change was made. The launch glided swiftly away, leaving the Fokker pulling gently at her sea-anchor. The Smiths found the Consul's launch to be a speedy craft and an hour after leaving the plane, the party arrived at Jedda.

They had no trouble at all with the port officials, who were obviously much impressed by the princely garb of Mr. Smith. So leaving the crew of the

launch to await their return, the three started to walk to the Consul's house.

A celebrated Eastern traveler has said that "Arabia is indeed a topsy-turvy land. Where we measure most of our liquids and weigh most of our solids, they weigh their liquids and measure their solids. Where we use knives and forks and spoons, they use their fingers. Where we use tables and chairs, they recline on the floor. Where we mount from the left, they mount their camels and horses from the right, while they read from right to left. The desert dweller keeps his head covered in summer and winter alike, and his feet usually unprotected. Where we take off our hats in entering a friend's house, they take off their shoes.

"Golly!" exclaimed Billy as they wended their way along a bewildering maze of narrow, zigzag canons between tall, tottering houses. "This place is a nightmare! How do they keep from getting lost?"

The Consul replied in Arabic and Billy realized he must watch his tongue.

"It comes with association, Bill," he replied. "One gets used to crooked streets and houses which look as if they'd been joggled about by earthquakes. As you see, many are five and six stories high and are used by pilgrims who pass through the city on their way to Mecca during Ramadan, a time when the population of Jedda increases from

twenty thousand to perhaps one hundred thousand. Mr. Lowell Thomas has said that 'the most fitting way of describing this weird Arabian seaport is to say that it looks like any Oriental city might look to a man suffering from delirium tremens'. . . . But here we are at my humble abode."

He knocked sharply at a door in a whitewashed wall, which was immediately opened by an Arab servant.

"Na'm Alla 'aliak"—(Allah's blessing upon thee), said the man, as the trio passed into a small courtyard.

"Greeting, Saadi!" returned Mr. Perkins in the vernacular, "how's the Bedouin Zeid?"

"He still lives, Master," replied Saadi. "Allah is indeed merciful."

" 'Tis well. These are friends of his. We will go to him." The Consul led the way around a fountain to the door of the house. Once inside the Smiths doffed their sandals and then followed him to a room in the rear.

Here on a low couch, a boy beside him gently waving a fan, lay a young man. From his face drawn with pain, feverish eyes looked up at them, but it was plain that the man saw nothing. He merely mumbled in delirium.

Mr. Perkins motioned the servant with the fan to leave the room, then bent over the invalid.

"Zeid— Zeid—" he called. "The one thou awaited has come. He is here beside me."

For a moment the eyes shone with a flash of intelligence. "Ahmed—Ahmed the swordmaker—near Masjid Al Haram—" the dying man whispered, "go quickly—or it—will be—too late."

Exhausted by the effort to speak, the tired eyes closed and his body relaxed.

"That was the last spark, I'm afraid," muttered Mr. Smith. "We were only just in time—poor fellow."

"No—look!" exclaimed Billy.

Impossible though it seemed, the sick man had raised himself on an elbow. "La ilaha Alla wa Miihammad-ar-rasul Allah!" he whispered feebly; as this very day millions of Moslems are turning their faces five times toward Mecca and declaring over and over again, "There is but one God, Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet."

With this last profession of his faith the young man fell back on the couch. Zeid, true son of the faithful, was dead.

Mr. Smith bent down and drew the thin coverlet over the Arab's face. Then with a sign to Bill to follow, he passed with the Consul into the next room.

"Poor Zeid," said Consul Perkins when the heavy curtain had dropped behind them. "He did his best, but his death certainly complicates mat-

ters. His last words were evidently intended for a message: what does it mean?"

"He said," supplied Billy, " 'Ahmed the sword-maker—near Masjid Al Haram' . . . That has a familiar sound but I can't place it."

"And if we don't place it, you gentlemen will be out of luck," remarked Mr. Perkins dolefully. "Arabia is a vast country—larger in fact than England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Holland, France, Belgium and Spain all combined! It will be like hunting the proverbial needle in a very big haystack."

"Masjid Al Haram," repeated Billy. "That means the sacred temple, but there are thousands of Mosques in Arabia and of course, they're all sacred!"

"Bill," interrupted his father, "haven't I told you that a disguise is no good unless the wearer lives and thinks the part? You are dressed as an Arab—a Bedouin—think like one. Think like the Mohammedan you're supposed to be. What is the holiest—the most sacred of all mosques?"

"The Mosque of the Kaaba in Mecca," replied Billy, "—the mosque of sacred black stone. Moslems believe that the angel Gabriel tossed the stone from heaven to Abraham."

"I should have known that," said the Consul. "Yet now that we know where Ahmed the Sword-

marker's house is to be found—you gentlemen are not much nearer your goal."

"And why not?" questioned Mr. Smith.

"Because, my good sir, it is one thing to come to Jedda—vouched for by me—and quite another proposition for a white man, a non-Mohammedan, to enter holy Mecca—quite impossible, I should say. In fact, I feel I cannot, in my consular position, be responsible for any such move. Should you be discovered, it might precipitate a holy war—foreign complications and whatnot. No, sir! Mecca is quite out of the question."

Mr. Smith, who had been sitting cross-legged on a divan, rose to his feet.

"You are right, Consul; my son and I are most grateful for your assistance so far and we appreciate your position. Mecca, I fear, is not to be thought of. If you will have one of your men guide us back to the harbor, we will borrow your launch to take us out to the plane and attempt to think of a new plan."

"That's the idea," beamed the consul as he shook hands, "—I felt sure you would realize my predicament. Goodbye and good luck to you both!"

As they followed the Consul's servant through the gate in the garden wall and passed into the city streets, Bill, who could not understand his father's attitude began to remonstrate.

Mr. Smith, however, interrupted him. "Be calm,

my son," he said in Arabic, "it is quite possible you will drink Zem Zem water yet—but not if you forget yourself and speak in any tongue but holy Arabic!"

Since he knew that the Holy Well of Zem Zem was situated in the Mosque of the Kaaba, Bill realized that his father still held a plan in reserve —and kept quiet.

Presently they came to the Port and the waiting launch. Whether it was Mr. Smith's dress as a Prince of Mecca that smoothed the way, or whether the Port Authorities felt that the American's consul's guests were bona fide; at any rate, no particular attention was paid them by the police.

As the launch sped out to the Fokker, no word was spoken by father or son. But when the plane was sighted, Billy, at a glance from his father, thanked the crew and made them a present of money.

When the launch had sheered off leaving the Smiths aboard the plane, Billy turned to his father.

"What's the good word, dad?"

"On to Mecca, son. It was too dangerous to let the consul into our plans. He has his official position to consider. As it was, he disliked very much the risk he ran in bringing us to Jedda. I want you to take off now and run south, keeping about thirty miles off the coast. We've got to pick up the *Dol-*

phin, so we can change our pontoons for landing gear. A seaplane will be of no use in the desert."

Ten minutes later the big plane was flying southward and within the hour Bill had located the oil boat steaming to meet them. After she hove to, Billy landed the Fokker and taxied slowly over the smooth sea to her side.

"She certainly looks like an airplane carrier," Bill remarked, staring at the wide landing deck that had been erected. "I see they have a crane rigged up to haul the bus aboard. Here's hoping it doesn't start to blow before the job is finished."

The weather, however, continued fine, and after the tackle had been adjusted the crane hoisted the Fokker aboard the ship just as the sun rose over the Asiatic horizon. The plane was secured to the improvised landing deck and her crew, after a hearty breakfast, sought their bunks.

As they left the table, Mr. Smith spoke to his son.

"We'll be called at four this afternoon, Bill. Remember we have another night's work ahead."

"We should worry, dad—we ought to be used to it by this time." Bill laughed. "And everything's jake so far!"

"Well, it looks to me like the lull before the storm," said his father. "Tonight we hop off into the desert. There, you know, as far as we're concerned, everyone will be an enemy. All we really

know about the country is that Mecca lies slightly over a hundred miles east of this ship. Somehow we must hide the plane in the desert and enter Mecca on foot. Think it over. Not such an easy enterprise, after all; and one fraught with all kinds of hazard for us, and the plane. Still, as you say, 'we should worry!'—Go to bed now and get a good rest. We'll let tonight take care of itself."

CHAPTER VII

MR. SMITH GOES TO MECCA

BILL awoke to find his father gently shaking him.

"Glory, boy!" Mr. Smith ejaculated, "you're a heavy sleeper—come on, wake up! It's four o'clock and time we got busy."

After a hasty meal, they found the two airplane men on deck, hard at work, and for the next few hours, Bill and his father sweated like navvies.

The pontoons were changed for landing gear and the Fokker overhauled from nose to tail. When she had been pronounced absolutely airworthy, the depleted gasoline tanks were filled to capacity, and the time had come for another well-earned meal.

Night had fallen dark and cloudy as Bill and his father, both in native costume, were bade Godspeed by the *Dolphin's* crew and the two airplane mechanics. After shaking hands all round, the Smiths climbed aboard the Fokker and Bill set the motor idling.

Mr. Smith who had changed his princely Arab costume for the less ostentatious garb of some

chieftain of a desert tribe, took his seat directly behind the pilot.

"Orders, dad?"

The holy city of Islam. . . ." Billy's father announced solemnly in Arabic, "is located in a narrow pocket between the hills where two valleys join. Fly high—locate Mecca by the lights of the three forts which guard the city from the hills above—then land four or five miles away. You must study the terrain below to the best of your ability and come down on a spot where we can hide the plane while we enter the city. Mecca, I should judge, lies seventy-five or eighty miles east and slightly south. That's all, son. I'm ready, if you are."

Bill waved to the two mechanics and threw in his clutch. At the same instant he pulled the landgear release, and the big plane, no longer moored by her wheels to the deck, shot forward. In less time than it takes to tell, she taxied to the edge of the overhanging deck gaining speed with every foot, and darted into the air. Bill circled the ship once to tell them all was well, then pointing the plane's nose eastward, started to climb.

Soon the Red Sea had been left behind and below them lay the bare, flat reaches of the desert. As the plane progressed inland, all cloudiness disappeared, although at their necessary altitude of six thousand feet, visibility to the naked eye was poor

But even at that height they could discern the flat country beneath them gradually become rolling, dotted here and there with fairly high hills.

"Pass the night glasses, dad," Bill suggested. "The first thing we know the old bus will have overflown the city. Even at this height our motor can be heard and I don't want to circle about any more than I can help."

After a long, careful searching of the country below, Bill passed the glasses back to his father. "There are the forts, dad. Take a look?"

Mr. Smith adjusted the binoculars and turned them in the direction Bill had pointed. Far ahead and slightly to the left the horizon seemed to be lighter—yes distinctly lighter, and on the edge of this light, he gradually made out three small clusters of twinkling lights.

"That's Mecca," he announced at last.

"It must be, dad. Now I'm going to turn south and shut off the engine. We'll make our landing survey with a silent motor. There's no sense in announcing our visit to half Arabia in advance!"

With an easy bank to starboard Bill shoved the stick slightly forward and sent the Fokker in a long curving glide toward earth.

"Those glasses again, please, dad," he demanded. "This is going to be no cinch! I've a good idea this country is rocky, and I'm not keen on smashing her wheels tonight."

As the distance between the plane and the desert grew less, Bill saw that this was indeed a hilly country, criss-crossed by a maze of narrow, winding valleys.

They were perhaps fifteen hundred feet up when he passed back the glasses. "Here goes!" he cried, and shot the plane into a steep spiral. "Pray for a sandy bottom, dad—we'll need it!"

As they tipped earthwards, Mr. Smith noticed a circular depression in the hills. The spot covered about five acres at most and so far as he could see, the pocket was entirely empty of human habitation. Bill had leveled off and he felt the wheels of the landing gear strike terra firma. Then half a minute of jouncing bumps, and the plane halted.

"Not so bad for a dark night," said Billy. "What's the good word now?"

"From what I can see," his father replied, "this place is pretty well hidden—that is, unless some wandering Arabs should spot the Fokker from the rims of these hills that surround us."

"Exactly, dad—and when do we start for the Big City?"

"*We* don't start, Bill. I'm going into Mecca alone."

"Oh, I say, sir!"

"I'm the commanding officer of this expedition, son. Remember, you are under orders. Now listen to me: I'm starting right away. Mecca, as I figure,

is nine or ten miles north of us—perhaps not quite so far. I shall spend tomorrow looking up Ahmed, the swordmaker, but I shall not leave until after dark—naturally, I don't want to be followed. If I don't put in an appearance by ten tomorrow night, you'll know that something has gone wrong."

"I sure hate letting you do the dirty work, dad."

"Thanks, Bill. But there's no need for both of us to walk into the lion's mouth together, and you being the flyer, are the one to watch the plane—to make a quick getaway if you're seen. If that happens, return here by ten tomorrow night to pick me up. If I haven't returned by then, you are to go to Mecca yourself and seek out Ahmed. You are not to bother about me, but as soon as you learn Dr. Parker's whereabouts, leave Mecca at once and fly to him."

"But I couldn't leave Mecca without you, dad."

"But you will, if necessary, son. It is my order. Greater things than my life hang upon one of us reaching Dr. Parker. You're on government business, Bill—don't forget that."

"Just as you say, dad, but I can't say I like your going in there alone."

Mr. Smith stood up. His tone was kindly but firm. "Enough of this, Billy. I'm off. If you sleep —do it with one eye open—we can't afford to have the plane captured. Without it, we're bound to fail. Goodbye, son—and good luck."

"Goodbye, dad."

They shook hands and descending from the plane, walked silently to the foot of the hillside. Here they shook hands once more and Bill watched the tall figure of his father climb the steep incline and disappear, with a final wave of his hand, over the top.

Bill turned on his heel and walked slowly back to the plane. He felt depressed and discouraged. He hated to think of his father braving the dangers of Mecca alone. It looked like a hopeless and thankless job. But he had to carry on now it was started.

Suddenly, in the midst of his despair, Billy realized that he was both cold and hungry. Once aboard the plane he slipped a heavy camel's hair robe over his other garments, then took a small bar of chocolate and some dates from the food locker and clambered down to the ground once more.

A slow patrol of the pocket's rim while munching his food brought but a narrow vista of more barren hills strewn with large boulders. Yet in the little valley where the Fokker lay the ground was fairly smooth and in places covered with a coarse grass. They were lucky to have struck the place. Perhaps it was at that thought, more likely the warm robe and food, but Bill felt cheered nevertheless. He completely circled their valley, always

keeping below the skyline, then returned to the plane where he made himself comfortable and dropped into a doze.

He awoke to find that it was broad daylight. The cabin was frightfully hot, so throwing off his heavy robe he went to the food locker again and taking his breakfast of dates, bread and water with him, climbed down and sat in the shade of one of the wings.

That was one of the longest days Bill had ever experienced. As the sun climbed the cloudless horizon, the heat grew almost unbearable. Not a breath of wind entered the circular depression where he lay. The only breaks in the monotony were made by his occasional patrols of the valley's rim. But he saw no signs of any life whatsoever.

At last the sun sank and night dropped suddenly over the little valley. From that time on Bill kept looking at his watch on an average of every fifteen minutes. He walked over to the hillside where his father had disappeared in the direction of the city and in vain he scanned the crest with his night glasses for a sight of Mr. Smith.

Ten o'clock came at last—and half past; and eleven. At eleven o'clock Bill gave up his lonely vigil. In a frenzy of anxiety and haste he ran back to the plane, slung a small bottle of water over his shoulder, attached a parcel of food to his belt and set off for Mecca. Something *had* happened,

or his father would have returned as he had planned. Bill's heart was heavy as he tramped away from the valley that had harbored him for the past twenty-four hours.

As Bill trudged over the desert hills, he resolutely put his worries from him, and turned his mind to Mecca. He knew that it was not only the holy city of the Mohammedans because Mohammed himself had been born there, but that the region all about Mecca is sacred; pilgrims are not permitted to disturb the wild animals or even to cut the herbs or thorns of the desert. And he cursed the taboo as he stumbled into the long, sharp spines at nearly every step in the heavy darkness. As he hurried on he racked his brain for something that might be of assistance to him, but he remembered only such facts as were of little or no use—such as the fact that all Mohammedans not only turn toward Mecca when they pray but many of them build their houses facing the Prophet's birthplace and are buried facing the city. But this was all irrelevant. However, underneath his outer robe Bill had strapped an automatic to his belt which also carried an ugly-looking curved knife of native pattern. And Bill took satisfaction in the knowledge that these assistants would not fail him.

Presently, he came to a broad road, and after following it a while, entered the narrow mouth of a valley. Above him on the hills lay the three forts

housing King Hussein of Hajez' troops, stern reminders of the seriousness of this journey. He soon came upon numbers of little bands of people resting or sleeping by the roadside.

One such band hailed him. They were gathered about a fire, for the night, as is usual in the Arabian desert, was bitterly cold.

"May Allah give you peace, young sheik," one man called to him.

"By the Grace of Allah, peace to you," returned Bill, and walked over to the fire. "Is the Holy City so crowded that one must camp by the roadside?" he asked.

"Not so," replied the man, who seemed to be a leader of the band. "By the King's order none may enter or leave Mecca from sundown until sunup. Make yourself comfortable by the fire. There is plenty of room and in Allah's name you are welcome."

Bill made appropriate thanks and squatting on the ground near the fire, began munching his dates. Here was news! Perhaps after all his father had reached the gates after the hour of closing and for that reason had been detained. Bill gave a sigh of relief. Ten to one he had been worrying unnecessarily. He would wait by the gate in the morning and meet his father as he came out. With the optimism of youth he turned his thoughts to other things.

Near at hand lay a small boy, a goatherd, for nestling close were his flock, all sound asleep. Bill knew that about a thousand years before Columbus discovered America a small boy dressed as this boy and probably quite as ragged and dirty, had been herding goats and sheep on the hills above Mecca. That boy grew up and became a camel driver, later, a great prophet and emperor; the first man to bind the peoples of Arabia together into any kind of unity and to found the great religion which bears his name. Today, millions of people worship that name. Nearly every family in Arabia has one child named after the Prophet. There are more men in the world named "Mohammed" than there are with such names as "John" or "William."

As the sun rose Bill awoke with the stirring of the people about him, and from the city the voices of the muezzins on their towers calling the faithful to prayer. Throwing himself on his knees beside the little herd boy, his face toward the Holy City, Bill repeated with him the centuries' old formula, "There is but one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet!"

His friends of the night were gathering their belongings together, when Bill bade them goodbye and started off toward the city gate.

A number of people were leaving Mecca by its one exit, the road along which he traveled. As

they passed him, he carefully scanned their faces —but Mr. Smith was not of them. Arrived at the gate, he waited for more than an hour, but still there was no sign of his father.

Bill no longer had the slightest doubt but that he had been forcibly prevented from returning to the plane. With a sinking heart but with eyes and brain alert for hidden danger Bill got to his feet and passed through the gate into Mecca.

CHAPTER VIII

BILLY TAKES A HAND

JUST beyond or rather abutting the gate was the guardhouse, a low one-story structure built into the city wall. A sentry leaned upon his rifle beside the door and near him an urchin of some eight or ten years squatted on his heels in the dust. The boy seemed to be asleep. In reality he kept a steady watch on the crowd of people, camels, horses and donkeys that streamed through the gateway.

Presently a tall young Bedouin of the desert appeared walking slowly, and with dignity, befitting the son of a tribal chief.

" 'Tis he," muttered the raggamuffin and getting to his feet he sauntered along in the crowd beside the young tribesman. Then, with his eyes on the sand at his feet, and without turning, he said softly, *"Smith?"*

Bill had a hard time controlling himself but in a moment he replied in the same quiet vein, "Yes? . . ." With a swift, oblique glance he took in the youngster strolling beside him.

"If My Lord will pray by the Black Stone, I will

find him there. Follow these beggarly pilgrims. They will lead My Lord."

He dodged beneath the belly of a passing camel and was gone.

Bill, wondering whether he would do well to trust this advice, or whether he was simply walking into a trap, continued along the street with the crowd. He noted that though the streets he passed through were narrow and crooked, the buildings were finer than in Jedda and the shops larger and seemingly more prosperous. The heat, the dust and the odor of the unwashed crowds stifled him, but it was impossible to quicken his pace, so he pushed along, his mind busy with the problem of finding his father. As he approached the center of the city, he saw that he was gradually nearing a great mosque. Inasmuch as the stream of pilgrims headed toward the edifice, Bill knew it to be the Mosque of the Kaaba or Masjid el Haram, the most sacred of all the sacred temples of the Mohammedan church. With the press of people he passed through its holy portals and into a large sunbaked courtyard which so far as he could see must have covered several acres.

The place was filled with pilgrims, but his eyes immediately took in a small cube-shaped building, the famous Kaaba. Bill saw that it was covered with a gorgeous carpet of black silk with a wide border of gold lettering, texts from the Koran.

The roof was supported by pillars of aloewood and around the edge ran a spout of gold to carry off rain water. He moved nearer in the milling crowd of worshippers, his gaze centered on a black stone evidently of meteoric origin embedded in one of the walls. Although Bill didn't know it at the time he was looking at the most sacred object in the world to more than two hundred millions of people, for Mohammedans believe this stone was tossed down from heaven by the angel Gabriel to Father Abraham.

The people were surging like storm-swept waves about the rock in their endeavors to kiss the stone and Bill knew that being a Christian, if his disguise were discovered he would in all probability be torn to pieces by these religious zealots. As it was, they were likely to tear the clothes from his back in their wild crowding about the Black Stone. But as he was caught up in the throng and tossed this way and that, he felt an unusually violent tug on his abba, the black camel's hair robe that covered his white undergarment, and above the shouts of the worshippers a voice cried in his ear:

"If My Lord of the Desert will grasp his slave's hand he will guide him elsewhere. So by Allah's Grace we may be saved from being pulled into forty thousand pieces!"

Looking down, Bill recognized the Arab urchin of the City Gate and did as he was bidden. Five

minutes' pushing and pulling under the expert guidance of the youngster brought them out of the crowd.

"We cannot talk here," the boy exclaimed when once they were free. "There are many spies about who hunt a certain white man. If the sheik will follow, I will lead."

Bill weighed this move in his mind. "How am I to know you are to be trusted?" he asked.

"I am Nuri Said," replied the boy, "son of Ahmed the Swordmaker and cousin of Zeid."

"I'll take a chance on you, Nuri," said Bill. "Go ahead, I'll follow."

"My Lord is taking a big chance in coming to the Holy City. . . ."

"Do you know where my father is?" Bill interrupted.

"Yes Sheik. He is alive but wounded—and for the present, safe."

"Lead me to him, then, boy. We have delayed too long, now."

"Pardon, My Lord Master—we have made no delay. It is known to the Commander of the Faithful that he is within the city."

"You mean that King Hussein's soldiers are after him?"

"Yes, soldiers, but not in uniform—also his many spies. With pardon, Lord, it will not do for us to be seen any more together."

They had reached the outside of the Mosque.

"Direct your way along that street," pointed Nuri, "then take the fourth turning to the right—third left—then second street to the right again. You will then knock four times on the first door in the wall on your left. Friends will open for you."

"Let me see," Bill repeated the instructions as Nuri had given them. "Yes, I have it. Shall I meet you there, Nuri?"

"If Allah wills it so," returned the youngster.

"Well, here's hoping," said Bill with a grin, "for you're certainly proving to be the one and original lifesaver in this Holy City of unholy smells!"

But Nuri had darted into the crowd and was lost to sight. So, pushing his way through the polyglot throng before the church, Bill hurried down the narrow street the boy had pointed out.

The thoroughfare was lined with tall buildings whose ground floors without exception housed small shops. These varied in character from fine bazaars where expensive rugs were displayed to mere holes in the wall where everything in the world seemed jumbled together. Merchants cried their wares before their doors and haggled and argued with the buyers much as in a western market.

Bill turned to the right at the fourth cross street, then came to his next turning, a narrow winding

alley down whose center flowed an open sewer. The heat and the smells were nearly overpowering, and Bill longed mightily for the open desert. But there were fewer people here and the tall houses leaned forward in crazy attitudes; in many places arches had been built over the street between them presumably to keep them from falling into the roadway. At last he turned into a small square whose entire left hand side was enclosed by a high wall. A few paces further Bill marked an iron-bound door in the white wall. As there seemed to be no one about, he walked straight to it and knocked four times.

The door swung slowly back and Nuri stood before him.

"Well, I'll be jiggered" exclaimed Bill—or words to that effect in Arabic—as he stepped within a stone-paved courtyard. "I thought I left you at the Mosque?"

"I came another way," Nuri grinned. "But we must hasten."

He locked and bolted the door and signing Bill to follow led the way toward a whitewashed house across the court. Nuri knocked four times on the house-door which was immediately opened and they passed into a pitch black interior.

"Take my hand, Master," whispered Nuri, and Bill felt himself propelled forward and up a long flight of stone steps. Moving cautiously along a

dark corridor, they came to another staircase, this time of wood and very narrow. They ascended slowly; then as they reached the top, Nuri stopped before a small door, threw it open, and they walked out into blazing sunlight.

For a moment Bill was blinded by the glare. Then as he grew accustomed to the light he saw that they were standing on the flat roof of a large house, around whose outer edge ran a four-foot parapet. At the far side a low awning had been erected. In its shade was a couch, upon which a man lay, his face turned in their direction; beside him another man squatted on a rug.

As Bill and Nuri approached the man on the couch, he half arose on an elbow; Bill recognized him.

"Dad!" he cried, running forward and dropping to his knees beside the divan, "—Dad—are you badly hurt?"

Mr. Smith smiled crookedly beneath the bandages which covered half his face. "Not as badly as I might have been, son. Still—as you see, badly enough to throw me out. . . . These head bandages look important but they only cover a dent in my skull, and a clip over an eye—the really serious thing is that my right ankle is sprained and my left arm is broken. Now, never mind—" at an ejaculation from Bill, "they *will* mend, you know! But

it will be a matter of weeks—and you, my son, will have to carry on for me."

"That's O.K. with me, Dad—but how did this happen? How did you get hurt?"

"It was quite an adventure, Bill. First let me introduce you to our host who is jeopardizing his life, and the lives of his family to help us." He turned to the tall Arab who had risen to his feet. "Ahmed," he continued, "this is my son of whom I have told you. Bill, this is Ahmed the Sword-maker to whom your father is indebted for his life and liberty."

Bill and Ahmed shook hands solemnly.

"Zeid was my nephew," explained Ahmed, "his friends are my friends. As for the other—are we not all in the hands of Allah? My son, Nuri, I think you have already met," he concluded with a smile.

Mr. Smith broke into the conversation.

"We have little time to talk," he declared, sinking back on the cushions. "Briefly what had happened is this: Upon entering the city yesterday morning, I sought and found Ahmed in his shop. He gave me the location of Dr. Parker's expedition, for his nephew Zeid stopped here and told him the story on his way to Jedda. Zeid knew he was being followed and feared that something would happen to him. . . . I left Ahmed well sat-

isfied and started back toward the city gate. But there I was held up by the guard."

"The government spies had recognized you?" interpolated Bill.

"Probably. At any rate, the gate was barred to me and the officer of the guard informed me I was under arrest. To make a long story short, I attempted a foolhardy thing—I knocked the officer down, tripped up the sentry and took to my heels. The soldiers fired several shots which went wild, and I kept on going. I hadn't gone fifty yards when I came upon Ahmed and two of his apprentices who had been following to see if I got safely out of Mecca. They turned and ran back with me and we led the mob a merry chase through these crooked streets and alleys. As we were gaining on them, we'd have undoubtedly got away—but rounding a corner, we ran smack into ten or a dozen of the King's bodyguard. *Then* the fun began. Of course they heard the yells of our pursuers and tried to stop us. In the fight that followed I got mine.—In fact, right in the beginning a blow on the head put me out of the running, and I didn't wake up till Ahmed brought me here and revived me. But Ahmed tells me that he and his men were backed up against a house door, fighting for their lives, when the door opened suddenly, they streaked inside, slammed and barred the door against the soldiers. The owner of the house, a

friend of Ahmed's, had been watching from his rooftop, saw his opportunity, and came to their aid. He let Ahmed and his men out through the back, and they carried me here, to his house."

"But with you unconscious, how did they keep you from being killed in the scrimmage?"

"After they'd knocked out a couple of the soldiers, they managed to drag me back to the cover of the housewall, with their own bodies as my protection."

Bill drew a long breath. "Well, we certainly have a lot to thank Ahmed for."

"He's a great fellow—a staunch friend," replied Mr. Smith. "We both felt sure you would come to Mecca when I didn't join you as we'd planned, so Ahmed sent his son to meet you. As soon as you've had something to eat, you must go back to the plane and take Nuri with you. He has been given instructions by his father and will pass them on to you. But I'm too tired to talk more now. . . ." Mr. Smith was terribly pale, his voice grew fainter. . . . "Remember you are not to consider me—there's too much at stake. Under this pillow is a letter of instruction from our government to Dr. Parker giving him the authority he needs. It must reach him at the earliest possible moment. I—"

But nature would no longer be denied and Billy's

father, worn out by the exertion he had forced upon himself, fell back in a dead faint.

"Ahmed, quickly!" Bill bent over his father anxiously. But Ahmed had already seized a flask and poured a few drops of liquid between the wounded man's lips, while Bill chafed his wrists.

Presently Mr. Smith's eyelids fluttered open; he looked up at Bill and smiled.

"Take the letter, and go, son," he whispered. "—God bless you and give you success."

Bill could not trust himself to speak. Tears were very near, but grimly he choked them back—such childishness was not for him. He reached for the letter, tucked it safely away in his robe. Then he kissed his father, and rising to his feet, blindly followed Nuri across the roof and entered the house.

As they finished a hurried meal below, Ahmed joined them.

"You must leave at once," he commanded. "I have just had word that the Shereef's troops are on their way to this house. Hurry—and you may be able to reach the gates before they are closed—perhaps it is even now too late. But go now and may Allah be with you both."

Bill and Nuri had leaped to their feet at Ahmed's first words.

"But my father!" exclaimed Bill, "—if the troops are coming here—"

"We are in the hands of Allah—" cut in Ahmed,

"Remember that a son's first duty is obedience. . . . Farewell!"

Without another word the two lads left the room and hurried down to the courtyard.

CHAPTER IX

BILLY CARRIES ON

Nuri slowly opened the door in the courtyard wall and peered out.

"Not a soul in sight," he whispered. The two passed quickly into the square. The door closed behind them and Bill heard the bolt click into place. Ahmed was taking no chances of being surprised.

Out in the bright sunlight Bill saw that Nuri looked uncommonly well in his newly donned costume. He had discarded his rags for the flowing garb of a young Bedouin and seemed much taller and more mature than when Bill had first come upon him by the city gate.

They darted toward the corner of the square and started down the narrow alley by which Bill had come an hour earlier. Suddenly both boys stopped short in their tracks. Above the hum of the city they could hear distinctly the measured tread of soldiers, seemingly in the next street.

"The troops!" exclaimed Bill.

"—To the other end of the square—" muttered Nuri. Without more ado they turned and raced back across the square.

As they turned the corner, Bill caught Nuri's arm and stopped. He was thinking of his father, sick and helpless in that house. . . . "Come," urged Nuri, "we cannot help them—and we have other work to do."

"Yes—but if they take him off to prison—in his condition he will surely die."

"There are other ways out of the house than that we took," declared Nuri, "My father will see to him. Come—it is our job to get out of the city. Keep twenty paces behind me—we must not be seen together."

Quickly he turned and made off down a side street, and Bill, waiting till the boy had gained a good start, followed, keeping him well in sight.

After the coolness of Ahmed's house, the heat was almost unbearable. Again the odor of the East, fetid smells of rotting vegetables, dead fish, copra, and the stench of unwashed humanity sickened Bill to the point of faintness. Doggedly he trudged along, always keeping the young Arab in sight until he found himself in the street which led to the city gate through which he had entered that morning.

A dense throng filled the lower end of the thoroughfare. On the edge of the crowd he saw Nuri stop and speak to a man with a donkey. Giving Nuri no sign of recognition. Bill sauntered up to them.

"And so," he heard his partner say, "the gate is shut and no one is permitted to leave the city. How about the other gates?"

"It is the same with those, young Master," returned the peasant. "I have but now come from—"

"Have you learned when they will be opened again?" interrupted Bill.

"Allah the Merciful and His Highness the Grand Shereef alone can tell," the man replied, "It is whispered that there are unbelievers within the Holy City."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Bill fervently, and saw the ghost of a smile hover in Nuri's eyes.

"Be of good cheer—they will soon be caught and pay for their defilement with death. Then we may all go our ways in peace," declared the peasant.

Bill shrugged and turned away. He retraced his steps a short distance, and went down the first alley he came to. Here he waited in a doorway, and was presently joined by the boy.

"We're certainly up against it, Nuri," he said in a worried voice. "Those gates may not be opened for a week—of course, if they catch us—But I have been thinking; we still have three hours before sundown, and until then I want you to walk the streets behind the walls and try to locate an empty house. The nearer the house to the city wall, the better."

"I'm sorry, Master," returned Nuri, "but the walls form one side of a street throughout their entire circumference of the city. Of course there are houses on the farther side of the street, but I doubt if there are any empty—especially at this time when the city is so crowded. There are steps leading up to the walls in places, but they are guarded by soldiers night and day."

"The steps are out of the question," decided Bill. "But we must find a house through which we can get to the roof."

"That will be almost impossible, Master. Soon the whole city will be mad with excitement at the rumor of non-believers within the gates. Money cannot bribe them then. Even if we reached a roof, we'll be no nearer the wall, the street between is far too broad to jump."

"Well—do your best," urged Bill. "I'll meet you here at sundown. Meantime I have some purchases to make. Go now, and good luck to you!"

Nuri grinned and shook his head as he walked away. —The young Lord and Master would not acknowledge defeat—well, better so!

Bill turned into the thoroughfare and sauntered on toward the great bazaars in the heart of the city. Presently he stopped at a small shop and bought a large sack. Then, in another street, he stopped again, and after making his purchase, slipped it into the sack which he slung over his

shoulder. He bought several things more which he placed in the bag, but was careful never to patronize two shops on the same street.

Within the hour he had accumulated a number of interesting objects, which included a small but highly serviceable revolver for Nuri. There still remained two hours before his time of meeting with the younger lad, so he made his way over to the Mosque of the Holy Kaaba. Here he deposited his sack in a shaded corner of the cloisters which enclose the great open place in the center of the temple. Using the sack as a pillow, he curled up on the pavement and was asleep in five minutes. Inasmuch as a hundred or more weary pilgrims were doing the same, nobody took the slightest notice of him.

Shortly before sunset he awoke, and shouldering his sack, left the temple. One more stop he made in the crowded bazaar where he bought a wristwatch with a luminous dial, and then strolled on toward the alley near the gate which was to be the meeting-place. He hoped and prayed that Nuri had not been forced to tramp the steaming city for the past three hours, but he might just as well have spared his sympathy, for when he reached the place where they had parted, there lay Nuri sound asleep in the doorway!

Bill leaned over and touched him on the shoulder. Like a shot the boy bounded into the

middle of the narrow street and an ugly knife glittered in his hand. Arabs, like the North American Indians and other nomads, when suddenly aroused from sleep, awaken fully on the instant. Nuri was no exception. He laughed and put away the dagger when he saw Bill.

"Pardon, Master—I did not recognize you at first."

"That's all right, Nuri. They won't catch you napping, anyway! But look here, Nuri—cut out calling me Master. My name is Bill!"

"Beel?" said Nuri.

"No—Bill."

"Yes—I know, Beel. Well, Beel, I have news—both good and bad. The bad news is that sentries now guard the house where your father and mine were. Therefore the house is now in the hands of the troops. That does not mean that our honored Parents have been taken. About them I could learn nothing. For the present we must leave them out of our thoughts. That was their wish and is the will of Allah."

"And some hard job, if you ask me," Bill cut in. "How about the good news, Nuri?"

"I have found a house facing the wall whose roof we ought to be able to reach by climbing—but we'll need a strong rope."

"Here it is—right in this sack—" announced Bill triumphantly. "I bought it this afternoon."

"Good! We had better be off then—it's over a mile to the house. We can talk as we go. Now that darkness has fallen we can keep together without so much chance of being recognized."

"One moment, Nuri—I bought a couple of things for you which will probably come in handy." Bill gave him the revolver and wristwatch.

"These—for me?" exclaimed the delighted boy.

"Of course! You'll need 'em—soon," retorted Bill. "Come on!"

Nuri's eyes sparkled with pleasure as they started off along the narrow, winding street. The holster he strapped to the belt beneath his outer robe of black camel's hair, then proudly fastened the watch on his wrist.

"A thousand thanks, Mas—I mean Beel!" he cried, delightedly staring at the phosphorescent numbers on the dial. "Never before have I seen a watch by which one could tell the time at night. It is wonderful!"

"I'm glad you like it," remarked Bill, "but let's get down to business. Tell me what you have found out."

"Not much, Beel. I'm afraid I was recognized by one of the Shereef's spies—but—well, he did not catch me. I chose this house we are seeking now because I believe it is empty, although I could not get inside to make sure. There is a balcony on each

floor and they will help us get to the roof. But without wings we'll never reach the wall."

"Without *wings!*" repeated Billy, as they entered another long street, even darker and more smelly than the last one. "I think you said wings, Nuri—Well, I have them here in the bag!"

Bill chuckled at Nuri's answer, the Arabic equivalent of "quit your kidding!" Then replied in impressive tones, "You just wait and see!"

As they hurried along Bill wondered how Nuri could possibly find his way through the pitch black streets without the aid of a lantern, but the boy seemed never at a loss and trudged along humming a dirgelike tune between his teeth.

At last, after about twenty minutes of quick stepping, Nuri came to a halt on a corner.

"Here, this is the place, Beel," he declared.

They were standing at a cross street whose farther side was bounded by a high blank wall—evidently the wall of the city. Facing the wall on the right hand corner was a tall house, whose façade above the ground floor was broken by a series of balconies, one to a floor. By straining his gaze Bill counted five of them set within the outer wall of the house like dark niches in its otherwise blank surface.

"Well, this looks pretty good, Nuri. Now for the bag of tricks," said Bill.

He drew a light rope-ladder from the sack and

after some fumbling brought forth a steel hook which he tied tightly to one end. The street seemed deserted, so Bill started to work while the younger boy watched his every move with intense interest. First he rolled up the ladder leaving the grapnel on the outside and retaining hold of the other end. Then he gave it an underhand toss over the parapet. At the third trial the hook caught on the coping and after making sure that nobody was in sight, the two lads climbed the ladder.

They found themselves on a balcony some six feet deep from which a door led to the house within. But the door was locked and the two dark windows flanking it on either side were barred with heavy grills of wrought iron.

"Not a chance to get inside," grumbled Bill. "We'll have to go up all the way by the ladder, and it isn't going to be easy."

First he took a short piece of rope from his sack and made it fast to the window grille. Then again he rolled up the ladder but this time he gave it to Nuri.

"You're the smaller, so climb up on my shoulders," he directed. "That's right—now, sit on the back of my neck and get a grip around my waist with your feet. The way these balconies are built, it would be impossible to throw the grapnel over the coping from underneath here, so I'm going to get on the parapet and let you do it."

Although the brick parapet was low, it was a test of Bill's strength to climb up and stand on the coping with Nuri on his shoulders. A misstep or loss of balance would send them hurtling down to the street. Eventually he stood erect and grasped the rope he had fastened to the grille.

"Now, Nuri," he ordered, "lean back and outward as far as you can and throw that grapnel over the parapet above your head so that it catches on the edge of the coping."

As Nuri leaned back, Bill strained on the rope he held to keep from toppling over backward. Of a sudden he felt the young Arab's body grow tense and there came a sound of metal striking stone.

"Praise be to Allah!" ejaculated a voice above his head. "The hook caught at the first try."

With the ladder secured it was not difficult for them to reach the balcony above. On this they used the same methods to reach the third—the fourth, and the fifth. Eventually the two found themselves resting on the roof of the house. It had been slow, arduous labor, and Bill marveled that Nuri had shown no fear in reaching the dizzy heights to which they had climbed.

Across the street Mecca's wall loomed some ten feet above them.

"Are you ready to go on?" asked Bill.

"I am ready," replied Nuri, "—bring out your wings, Beel!"

CHAPTER X

THE ESCAPE

BILLY opened the sack again and drew forth a large coil of thin, black rope.

"Camel's hair?" asked Nuri.

"Yes, camel's hair and strong enough to hold five of us," answered Bill.

Nuri showed no particular enthusiasm. "I can't see how you're going to get it caught on the top of the wall, if that is your plan," he argued. "If you tie a grapnel to the end as you did with the ladder, you'll find the distance across the street far too great to throw the hook, with the weight of that big coil of rope dragging it back. . . . And how about the sentries? I saw one pass along the top of the wall behind the parapet only a moment ago."

"That's where your wristwatch comes in," said Bill. "While I'm fixing a way for us to get over to the wall, I want you to watch for that sentry and tell me the length of time he takes to reach the ends of his beat and return to a point directly in front of this house. Be sure you gauge it right—or we'll soon find ourselves in one of the Shereef's unpleasant dungeons!"

Nuri walked over to the low stone balustrade

at the edge of the roof while Bill got busy on his job. From the sack he drew forth more of his purchases. This time a larger grapnel came to light and next a small pulley. This he secured to the shank of the grapnel by means of a short loop of strong wire. Two large balls of string were next taken from the sack, leaving that receptacle empty. He unrolled the balls of string, carefully coiling them as he did so. The two coils he placed on the roof just behind the balustrade and about a foot apart. When these were arranged to his satisfaction he coiled the camel's hair rope and laid that on the roof a little behind the loose coils of string.

Nuri, during these proceedings, remained at his post, his eyes eagerly scanning the wall opposite. The boy doubted Bill's ability to get them over the city wall and into the country beyond, but had made up his mind to obey orders to the letter. Failure would not come through any careless slip on his part, he assured himself.

Meanwhile Bill took an end from one of the coils of cord and passed it through the small pulley now firmly fastened to the long steel hook. Then he tied that end of cord to an end of the other coil of string. Having satisfied himself that the small knot joining the two lengths of cord passed easily through the pulley, he tied one free end of cord to the camel's hair rope and then fastened the other end to a post of the balustrade.

All this had taken some time and he was not surprised when Nuri spoke to him.

"That sentry," said the young Arab, "takes four minutes to go to the end of his beat and return, when he passes a point opposite this house, going to the left; but it takes him fully twenty minutes when he passes back to the right. There he goes now."

Bill peered through the gloom and could just make out the man's head and his bayonet silhouetted on the overcast sky above the wall's castellated battlements.

"He's starting the long leg of his walk," he announced. "We'll give him three minutes to get going. Sit down on the roof out of my way and tell me when the time's up."

Bill picked up the grapnel and sliding his other hand along both lengths of cord ran through the pulley until he had a loop about two feet long, he grasped it tightly and stepped back a couple of yards from the edge of the roof.

"Time!" Nuri called and turned his eyes on Bill.

He saw the older fellow swing the loop with grapnel and pulley at the end of it around his head, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Then with the increased momentum, he saw the loop grow longer and even longer until the grapnel pulley spun in an arc several yards from Bill's head. Suddenly Nuri saw him sling it from him much as a

sailor heaves a lead. Away sailed the grapnel over the street and while the Arab watched with bated breath, it fell with a metallic clang on the top of the city wall behind the battlement.

For a moment neither boy moved.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Billy. "I should have wrapped cloth around that hook. If the sentry heard and comes back to investigate, we're sure out of luck!"

Another sixty seconds passed. Then, as nobody appeared on the wall, Bill took heart again. Slowly and with the utmost care he pulled on the double length of cord that sagged over the street. Presently it grew taut. Now Bill pulled it toward him but an inch at a time.

"Three cheers!" he fairly shouted at last. "The old hook holds—come here and lend a hand, Nuri."

That young man who had viewed the entire proceedings with a surprise tinged with awe, did as he was told.

"By Allah! It was marvelous, Beel," he cried. "What next?"

"Grab that camel's hair rope. First tie the free end to the balustrade. I should have done it before. Fasten it good and tight for I hope to have it bear our weight before long.—Got that?"

"It would take a sharp knife to loosen it now," replied the other a moment later.

"Good—now get hold of the end fastened to the string."

"I've got it."

"Fine. Now I'm going to pull on the other string. The idea is to pull that rope over the street, through the pulley and back again. It's plenty long enough, so don't worry. But I want you to keep it taut as it slides through your fingers, otherwise that grapnel over there will slip."

Two minutes later Bill had pulled the rope through the pulley and held the end he had fastened to the cord in his hands once more.

"Now, Nuri, cut the other end of this rope loose from the balustrade—that's right. Pass it over here."

Quickly he knotted the two rope ends so that they passed around a post.

"There's our bridge," he declared. "I'll go first. When you see me reach the wall, get over the balustrade, hang onto the rope and I'll pull you over. Be sure to get a good grip on it, with both your hands and legs, Nuri—if you drop into the street, you'll make an awful mess, and completely spoil this party!"

With this admonition, Bill climbed the stone rail and onto the rope. Here his training at the Naval Academy stood him in good stead. While the small Arab watched wide-eyed with admiration and excitement, Bill swung himself hand over hand

along the rope much as if he had been exercising on flying rings in a gymnasium.

At length Nuri saw him climb over the wall's low parapet and beckon for him to follow.

Nuri's short life had embraced no such adventure as climbing rigging, but he had a stout heart and now although the distance to the street made him shudder, he did not draw back. Leaning over the balustrade as he had seen Bill do, he gripped the rope with both hands and swung clear. Next he brought his legs up and over the rope. Then, because the height made him dizzy he closed his eyes. The rope which he clung to began to move and after what seemed hours, although it was really but a minute or two, he heard a voice above him.

"Give me your hand, Nuri," Bill whispered, "Hurry up—that's the boy!"

He dragged the youngster into a niche in the wall's parapet, then leaning over cut the rope and hauled it in. A moment later their bridge lay neatly coiled at Bill's feet.

"That part of the job is over, Nuri," announced Bill with satisfaction. "The sentry will be here soon, so we'll have to wait before getting down the outside of this wall. The chances are he would spot our grapnel and I for one am not strong for having our rope cut while we're on the way down."

"The chances are he'll see us anyway," Nuri

declared grimly. "There's no place to hide here. . . . Shall I shoot him as he comes along, Beel?"

"You'll do nothing of the kind, you blood-thirsty young cub!"

"Then he'll shoot us both!"

"Wrong again. I'm going to introduce him to one of our national sports—it's called football. Here's a handkerchief. When he's down stuff it in his mouth—and pray Allah his gun doesn't go off. Any noise will bring the guards running. Jump into that niche over there and crouch down—here he comes."

The unsuspecting sentry was strolling along, his thoughts on the savory hot stew of lamb's collops he would have for supper, when without warning a heavy body flashed through the air, caught him just above the knees, crashing him backwards to the stone. His head struck the masonry and all went black.

"By Allah! Beel, you spring like a mountain lion!" exclaimed Nuri as he gagged the unconscious sentry. "What next, oh Master?"

"Gee, you seem to think this is a vaudeville show, Nuri!—Tie him up well and get what weapons he has in his clothes."

Bill picked up the rifle dropped by the sentry when he was tackled, and Nuri handed him two knives and a revolver.

"We'll take these along, they may come in

handy. This lad won't have much use for them for some time to come—that spring, as you called it, Nuri, is called a tackle."

"Will you teach me how to do it, Beel?"

"You bet—but just now we've got serious business on hand—let's get going."

He placed the grapnel securely on the outside parapet, tied an end of the rope under Nuri's armpits and lowered him rapidly down the wall. When the boy's jerk on the rope told him of a safe arrival on terra firma, he fastened the rope so it no longer ran through the pulley. Then after slinging the sentry's rifle over his back by its strap, he went down the rope hand over hand.

Once at the foot of the wall, Bill shook free of the grapnel and after coiling the rope the two lads struck out across the darkness of the desert in the direction of the airplane cache.

CHAPTER XI

OVER THE DESERT

An hour and a half later Bill and Nuri stumbled over the rim of the natural bowl in the desert which the young American had left twenty-four hours before. Billy had conjured up visions of a stolen or wrecked plane, on the way over from Mecca, and it was with a sigh of relief that he saw the Fokker, lying in the silent starlight quite as he had secured her the previous night.

"Pretty good hiding place, this, Nuri," he remarked. "Nobody's found it."

"There's a reason," replied the young Arab, quickening his pace toward the plane.

"What's that?"

" 'Tis well known this valley is haunted by devils, Beel."

Bill laughed. "O.K. boy—but these two devils aren't going to haunt it for very much longer. Hop aboard, young feller. We'll get a light and read my father's instructions."

Once inside the plane, Nuri held a flashlight while Bill produced the envelope Mr. Smith had given him. First he drew forth another envelope, sealed and addressed to Dr. Parker. This he laid

to one side and then extracted a single sheet of paper which he read twice over and tore into small pieces.

"That's done," he announced grimly. "Nuri, old scout, we've got a nice little piece of desert to cross in this bus. Dad tells me Dr. Parker has located valuable oil wells at a point in the Desert of Roba el Khali about five hundred miles east and slightly south of Mecca."

"But the Roba el Khali is enormous—" countered the boy. "It will be like trying to find a grain of sand in a bale of camel's hair. We shall never find those people."

"Oh, yes, we shall, Nuri."

"How can it be done, Beel?"

"The same way that Zeid found his way back to Mecca."

"By using the sun daytimes and the stars by night to guide him?"

"Exactly!"

"But to locate a great city is one thing, Beel; to find a few men with their caravan, quite another."

"According to Dad's note, Dr. Parker located the oil wells at a point in the desert about five hundred miles east and south of here, as I said before. Those wells are on the edge of the Beni Khelb country."

"By Allah's help all will be well, then," Nuri

interrupted. "Mohammed Ibn, sheik of the Beni Khelb tribe is my father's cousin!"

Bill nodded. "So Dad writes—but listen to this: the Beni Murra, blood enemies of your cousin's tribe also claim these wells. The French have joined with them and their combined forces have Dr. Parker and his crowd surrounded. It's our job to find your cousin Mohammed Ibn and persuade him to help rescue Dr. Parker if possible—so far he has kept out of it."

"That does not sound well," Nuri commented. "The Beni Murra is a stronger tribe than the Beni Khelb and with the French to fight as well there isn't a chance for your plan to work. I am certain you'll never be able to persuade my cousin to send his men to certain defeat and death."

"We can try—and try hard," Billy declared vehemently. "—Angels could do no more—which reminds me that we'd better be using our own wings and stop chewing the rag! While I'm getting ready for the take-off, dig into that locker over there and bring out the map. I want it handy once we are under way."

When Bill had satisfied himself that everything aboard was as it should be, he got out of the plane and with Nuri's aid pushed her back to the edge of the hollow in which she lay. He knew he would need every yard of space for the take-off. At best it would be a near thing for the sides of the valley

rose to a good height and Bill knew that a plane given too much altitude on the take-off will stall its motor. He wasn't going to crash the sides of their hiding place before they got fairly started—not if he could help it.

When the plane had been placed to Bill's satisfaction and several boulders removed from the ground over which they must taxi, the lads climbed aboard again.

"Ever been up before?" asked Bill as he set the motor idling.

"Never, Beel."

"Scared?"

"A son of the desert knows no fear—but between you and me I feel kind of queer in my stomach!"

"Everybody does at first, Nuri. It's nothing to be ashamed of. You can get breakfast after we've started. That will give you something to do and we'll both be better off for some food. Sit tight now—it's liable to be rough going until we get into the air."

It was typical of Bill that he gave the young Arab no idea of the danger that take-off held in store for them. Slowly at first, but gaining speed with every revolution of the propeller the big plane moved forward. Bill gradually gave her more gas until they were racing over the uneven ground, taking the high spots in a series of bumps that

jarred the Fokker to its very core. Straight at the high bank of the valley they rushed. Nuri, who hung onto his seat for dear life, felt sure they would smash and shut his eyes with a hurried prayer to Allah for safety.

Bill was not praying. With his whole mind concentrated on the job, he kept feeding the powerful motor more gas and watching the receding distance between them and the valley walls.

"Speed—speed—more speed!" he kept muttering, expecting the plane to porpoise at each succeeding bump.

"If she doesn't take it now," he thought, "we're goners!"

Back came his stick and slowly the big plane took the air. Too slowly for Bill: he must give her more altitude or they would never clear the rocks. Would the motor stand it? She must—stalling now meant death. While his heart missed a beat he jerked back the stick and—a slight jar—one of the landing wheels had only just touched. They were over—Allah be praised, they were over. But the motor was missing, the strain too great; to rectify that he pushed his stick slightly forward. As soon as their climbing angle became less steep their motor trouble stopped as if by magic. Pushing on his right pedal with an eye on the bank and turn indicator as they mounted, Bill brought her nose around until he saw by their compass that the plane was

pointed east by south. Then, when the altimeter registered fifteen hundred feet he leveled off and called to Nuri.

"Hi, pardner—getting on all right?"

"Fine, Beel—I am what the English call 'K-nought.'"

"Hmm—maybe *they're* 'K-nought,' but Americans are K.O.—Like flying?"

"It is wonderful. How fast are we going, Beel?"

"See that gadget on the dash?" Bill pointed.

"Yes, I see it."

"That's the airspeed indicator, Nuri. It tells me our airspeed is ninety-five miles an hour."

"What do you mean by air speed, Beel?"

"Air speed—the speed of my aircraft, Nuri, is constant. If your plane's maximum speed is ninety-five miles per hour, that must be your airspeed, the velocity of the plane traveling through the air."

"I understand, Beel."

"Yes? Good for you! But there's a lot more to it—one of these days I'll give you a lesson, if you like. But I can't drive this bus much longer on an empty stomach. Rustle some grub, and make it snappy, will you?"

Nuri assented, and began to search the food locker. In a little while the boys were heartily enjoying a meal of the usual bread, cheese and dates, with a thermos full of cold tea to wash it down.

"Is ninety-five miles an hour *our* maximum air speed?" inquired Nuri, after the edge of his appetite was gone.

Bill, with the stick in one hand, and a slab of bread and cheese in the other began to laugh.

"Pretty keen on this flying business, aren't you, Nuri?"

"I *sure* am, Beel," grinned the boy.

"Well, ninety-five isn't the maximum speed of this plane, but it's a good cruising speed just the same. This old boat wasn't built for racing but for distance flying. High speed with a full load is one hundred and eighteen miles per hour—that's air speed, of course."

"Whew!" exclaimed Nuri. "—going as fast as that one might fly right off the edge of the earth. . . .!"

"Gee, don't tell me you believe the earth is flat?"

"Of course it is. Some say it's round. That is silly—if it were we should fall off!"

Bill chuckled. "I'll be sorry to disillusion you, old chap. But it is round, and I'll prove it to you the next clear day you and I are up."

"Prove that the earth is round—how?"

"Why, if you fly high enough you can see the curve of the earth. That's simple enough, isn't it? Now—have you finished your chow?"

"Yes, Beel," Nuri answered quietly, a puzzled frown between his eyes. He was beginning to feel

that his education had been rather narrow—so many new things to learn these days.

"Then hand over the map and the pencil that goes with it. By the way, can you read a map?"

"My father has taught me."

"Fine—then take the pencil and make a mark at latitude 19, longitude 48. That's where Parker's wells are. Can you find the Wady Dauasir?"

"Oh, yes, it is here, Beel—and what is more I've visited my cousin when his tribe were encamped along the Wady last spring. There is a little water flowing there this time of year."

"Do you think he is likely to be there now?"

"Quite likely, Beel."

"How far is the part of Wady Dauasir that runs through the Beni Khelb country from Mecca?"

Nuri measured with his pencil on the map. "About four hundred miles, Beel."

"Great! At this speed, with hardly any wind, we'll be there an hour after daybreak, I should say. Fix yourself a bunk, old sport, and get some sleep. You'll need to rest up for tomorrow."

"Yes—but you, Beel?"

"Oh, I'm used to this and you're not. And I've got to drive this bus, so beat it now!"

The boy curled up on a rug and was fast asleep immediately. Bill, alone with his thoughts, resolutely turned his mind from his father's plight, to study the job on hand.

Below them in a sheen of reflected starlight lay the Great Arabian desert. It was not the flat, uninteresting land that Bill had imagined, but a hilly country of rock and sand stretching further than the eye could see to a murky horizon. Unconsciously he lowered his altitude the better to scan the landscape. The big plane was acting splendidly, and now as they flew over a valley he caught a glimpse of black tents beside the banks of an almost dry Wady—the dark blur of sleeping herds. Again he made out another group and flying still lower, looked down on a huddle of men and camels where a desert caravan rested for the night. Bill's mind wandered to thoughts of djinns and those invisible and mysterious influences with which the Arabs people their strange land. He passed over high hills whose rocky promontories loomed stark and bold like grim strongholds of the long forgotten past. Then again the Fokker traveled over wide empty stretches of rolling sand where light and shadow played strange tricks with the imagination—clumps of coarse grass and other Wadys were passed by. Gradually the eerie scene caught Bill in the grip of a kind of mystical premonition, and the thrill of high adventure surged in his heart.

Suddenly, as if in reply to his mood, the sky was bathed in light, the sun, a golden ball, appeared above the horizon and hung motionless, like the

dome of a Mosque in some holy city beyond the hills.

"Gee, some sunrise!" breathed Bill. Then, in sudden recollection of their objective, "We must be pretty nearly on top of old Wady What-d'you-call-it by this time."

In order to scan more closely the land of the Beni Khelb, he lowered the plane's altitude, and kept his gaze glued to the wide expanse of shimmering sand below. A moment later, Bill's heart skipped a beat. A little way ahead, a band of Arab horsemen formed a wide ring on the sand. In the center of this circle a young man knelt facing the rising sun. He was stripped to the waist, his arms bound behind his back. And to Bill's horror he saw the man who stood beside the captive raise aloft a glittering sword, ready to strike.

"Nuri!" He yelled— "the rifles—quick—the rifles!"

Bill's arm shot forward and with the sudden jerk of a bucking horse the great plane dove at the tribesmen.

CHAPTER XII

THE RESCUE

Nuri, like most Bedouin Arabs, when aroused suddenly from sleep, was on the alert in an instant. He sprang to his feet and grasped the gunrack, which fortunately for him was built solidly into the wall; for, as the plane lunged forward, he tightened his grip and was saved from taking a sprawl as every other loose article in the cabin rattled onto the floor.

"Hurry, Nuri," called Billy impatiently, "two guns—here!"

This time, Nuri caught the excitement in Bill's voice. Snatching two Winchester repeating rifles with their bandoliers of cartridges from the rack, he half slid, half fell down the incline of the cabin and into the pilot's cockpit. Meantime, Bill sent a staccato fusillade from his automatic and was satisfied to see two men drop from their saddles, while the ring of startled horsemen broke in wild confusion before the thundering onslaught of the big plane.

All in a second, as Nuri lifted his rifle to fire, he wondered what would happen when they crashed into the swirling crowd of men and horses below.

Then he drew a bead on the executioner who still stood undecided by his kneeling victim—but the man was given no chance to make up his mind, for Nuri pressed his second finger on the trigger and the tribesman fell, twitching in agony, to the ground. As the young Arab gritted his teeth in the face of an inevitable crash, Billy pulled back his stick, and swooping like a giant bird of prey the great plane swung up and on, its landing gear causing the astounded tribesmen to duck in their saddles.

The Bedouins were assuring themselves they were free of their winged enemy, when down she swooped again and the fusillade that came with her emptied many saddles. Having never seen a plane before, they were too awestruck to return more than a scattering fire, and their terrified, almost unmanageable steeds prevented anything but the wildest shooting.

At the third swoop they broke. Human nature could no longer stand the combination of fear and slaughter. No one gave a command, but suddenly every horseman was riding for his life. It was a rout, a riot, a stampede, and in a moment the desert was dotted in all directions with little groups of fleeing horsemen.

Now the plane swept the desert in a series of low circles, speeding the Arabs with well directed shots. Then Billy landed her and opening the low

door in the side of the Fokker's fuselage the two young airmen walked toward where the Bedouin boy with wrists still bound stood by the side of the fallen executioner.

"Those horsemen belong to the Beni Murra tribe," Nuri was explaining, "Mohammed Ibn, my cousin, will be glad when he learns what we have done. As you know, the Beni Khelb and the Beni Murra have been sworn enemies since before the memory of man."

"It's a mighty good thing we peppered the right crew," began Bill, when Nuri cut him short.

"Allah be praised forevermore! —It is Annad . . ." he cried and darted ahead to where the young Arab stood looking about him dazedly. By the time Bill came up, Nuri had unbound the captive and the two had embraced.

"Beel," he said formally, "this is Annad, my cousin and blood brother. He is the only son of Sheik Mohammed Ibn. Annad, this is Beel Smeet, son of a great farengi sheik. Beel is my master but we are as brothers."

"Khai el Nuri Khuya, (the brother of Nuri is my brother)," Annad uttered the words solemnly. Then quickly he drew the knife from Nuri's belt and pricked his own wrist with the point so that a few drops of blood appeared. As Bill extended his hand in greeting, Annad pricked his wrist also, and pressing the two small wounds together, he

said: "Your blood, Beel, now flows in me. My blood now flows in your veins. We are blood brothers. Today you have saved my life: henceforth it belongs to you. Mohammed Ibn and the Beni Khelb will rejoice."

Bill, who knew that Annad had bestowed upon him the greatest honor in his power, grasped the young sheik's hand. "I am proud to have been made your blood brother and a member of the Beni Khelb," he returned. "I did no more for you this morning than you would have done for me, and—" he added with a smile, "I didn't do it all by a long shot. Without Nuri's splendid marksmanship we'd never got those fellows on the run—the way he made them bite the sand was a surprise to me. It's no easy matter to hit a moving object from a flying airplane, believe me. So if thanks are due, Nuri and I will share them."

Nuri grinned delightedly at the praise, while Bill slipped out of his abba, and threw the cloak over Annad's naked shoulders.

"Thank you, brother," beamed Annad, appreciatively, and stooping he picked up the executioner's sword. "The farengi have a saying that a fair exchange is no robbery—this sword might have been my death—you, Beel, have given me life—it is for you."

"Thanks a lot, Annad. And now I guess we'll have to cut the chatter and get back to the plane.

Some of our frightened friends may boost up their nerve and come back again."

"How were you captured, Annad?" inquired Nuri as they walked toward the Fokker.

"I was riding back from an inspection of some of our outlying herds. The Beni Murra must have seen me in the distance for they laid an ambush and I rode right into it. They brought down my horse, but praise Allah, I shot four of them before they were able to take me prisoner. That was just before sunset yesterday. Had I not been the son of Mohammed Ibn, they would have cut my throat at once—but as it was they decided to give me a formal execution this morning."

"That's where they made their big mistake," laughed Bill.

"They did that," grinned the young Sheik. "And they got the fright of their lives as well. I tell you, Beel, although no true son of the Beni Khelb can really feel fear—when I knelt there in the sand awaiting the fall of that sword, and suddenly your plane appeared like a huge genii of the air, spouting death and fire—I—"

"You were darn glad to see us, I guess," cut in Bill, matter-of-fact-ly. "Hop aboard the genii—and see what it's like to be on the inside looking out!"

Young Annad, like many of the sons of wealthy sheiks had spent a year in Mecca and another six

months in the cities of northern Arabia which are British-controlled. He had seen British planes in the air, but never close by and now he was not hesitating to show his delighted interest in the big airbus. He asked so many questions that Bill at last told him he would explain everything in detail when they reached Mohammed Ibn and the black tents of the Beni Khelb. At mention of his father, the lad was at once ready to be off.

"I'd almost forgotten father," he said, ruefully. "He must be worried. Let us go quickly to him."

Soon they were speeding eastward, flying low with Billy at the controls and Annad acting as second pilot, pointing the way. Distances which seem great when crossed on foot or on horseback shrink to a matter of minutes when one is flying. So it was that in less than three-quarters of an hour later the three lads caught sight of fifty or sixty black tents set in a group near together, beside a wide Wady through which trickled a thin, sluggish stream of water. One tent set apart from the others was much larger than the rest. When Billy learned that this was Mohammed Ibn's encampment, he was surprised, for he had expected to see many hundreds of tents—and said so.

"We have many hundreds indeed," Annad told him, "but they are scattered in groups of forty or fifty each, over a radius of five miles or more

among the hills to the eastward. The camp we are coming to is that of my father, our relatives, and the warriors of his chosen bodyguard."

After circling the encampment Bill nosed down to a perfect crosswind landing on a level stretch just west of the tents. Then after hurriedly securing the plane the lads, led by Annad, walked swiftly over to the Bedouin camp.

As they approached, a number of dogs ran out and started barking furiously. Annad, all excitement, put his hand to his mouth and whooped like an Indian. There were answering shouts from the encampment. Women, slender and bronzed like the men, their faces unveiled, stood in front of the tents as the boys strode past. All were robed in long, dusty black garments that trailed the sand, their naked youngsters clinging to their skirts. All were frankly curious, unashamed, not in the least like the Moslem women of the towns. Several of them waved friendly greeting, and one of the pretty, younger ones shouted to them and laughed.

Nuri nudged Bill. "Our village beauties, eh? And not so bad, either."

At last they came to the great tent, a ninety-foot pavilion which faced away from all the others. Sheik Mohammed Ibn himself with a number of his bodyguard stood outside awaiting them, and raised his hands in welcome as Annad raced toward him. He was caught in his father's arms and Bill

with Nuri stood back while the young sheik poured forth a hurried recital of his capture and rescue.

Billy watched with interest, for Mohammed Ibn was a great personage. His fame as a fighter and leader during the World War when he and other chiefs had helped Colonel Lawrence and the British to drive the Turks out of Arabia was a matter of history. Many fascinating stories about this man flashed in a jumble through Billy's mind as he gazed at the tall figure: the overlord of fifty thousand flocks and ten thousand fighting men—a multi-millionaire even in terms of American dollars—the owner of six villages, many acres of cultivated desert land, and a palace where he kept a retinue of slaves and the eldest of his wives, but which he never lived in and rarely visited, except to entertain official guests of state. Mohammed Ibn preferred to lead his people and share their desert life.

He did not wear gorgeous robes. There was no special insignia of his rank. Except for the finer texture of his white Kafieh (headcloth) and the long-sleeved gumbaz (under-robe) of fine muslin which he wore beneath the black abba (cloak) of camel's hair Mohammed Ibn was dressed exactly as his warriors. The agal (head cloth) which topped his Kafieh was not the elaborate affair wound with gold thread usually worn by native

princes and nobles, but the simple Bedouin double circle of black twisted horsehair.

Annad finished speaking, and the Sheik walked rapidly over to Billy. Ignoring the young American's hand, he put both his arms around Billy shoulders, embraced him and kissed him on the forehead, saying "The blood brother and saviour of my son is now my son as well. The blessing of Allah be upon you, Beel Smeet!"

Then one of his men brought an Abba which the sheik helped Bill to put on. Since he had given Annad his own he had been without the Bedouin cloak that keeps out the fierce rays of the sun by day and the cold of the desert by night.

Next, the sheik embraced his small cousin, adding some gracious words of praise which brought a grin of pride and delight to Nuri's usually solemn face. Then, taking the boys' hands, he led them into the tent.

CHAPTER XIII

BLACK TENTS

THE Beni Khelb, pure Arabs of the desert, belong to a race that has one of the oldest forms of civilization. Arabians had a philosophy and literature when Europeans were undeveloped savages. These same Bedouins are one of the few peoples of the world whom the Romans were unable to conquer. Today they live as their forefathers lived when the human race was very young. They are obliged to lead a nomadic life for they must follow their herds from place to place in search of grass and water. Cruel to their enemies, they are a kindly people, affectionate to their wives and children. From time immemorial they have been great robbers, but the true Bedouin will not shed blood without just cause. Billy knew that there is more etiquette to be found in the black tents than in any Fifth Avenue mansion, and now that he was about to enter one he thanked his father's foresight and the long hours of instruction while crossing the Atlantic.

His father had said, when he questioned the necessity of such knowledge, "Some day you will find it will save you from keen embarrassment. A

blunder in etiquette is no trivial thing to the subtle Eastern mind. Unless a guest has taken the trouble to inform himself, he is bound to make mistakes no matter how great his natural courtesy."

The day had come now and Bill hoped he had not forgotten.

The interior of the pavilion proved to be deliciously cool, the dry sand of its floor strewn with brightly colored rugs. One end had been curtained off and Bill knew that behind those hangings lay the hareem where dwelt the Sheik's wives and children. Mohammed Ibn led his guests toward that wall, where they seated themselves on a luxurious couch of rugs, backed by camel's saddles. A black slave appeared with a wooden bowl of fresh, foaming camel's milk. He dropped upon his knees and presented it to the Sheik, who shook his head and pointed to Billy.

"No, thank you," said he, refusing the drink.

The black grinned his pleasure and flashed his eyes at his master, who seemed pleased, also. Both Nuri and Annad laughed outright.

"Wein el farengi? (Where is the foreigner?)" asked the sheik with a smile. "Beel, my son, you are no foreigner, but a true Bedawi (Bedouin)."

Mohammed Ibn, in motioning the black to serve Bill first, had simply made a concession to what he thought might be Bill's idea of the courtesy due a farengi from a Bedouin. But the Amer-

ican lad knew that it was proper for him to accept any refreshment which Mohammed Ibn offered with his own hand, but that if another served it, the sheik must have precedence. To these Arabs it was an assurance that Bill came to them not as a condescending member of another race, but that he wished to be accepted as a friend, and to respect their customs, great and small. Truly, his father's teaching was bearing fruit.

After Mohammed Ibn had drunk from the bowl of camel's milk, the black passed it to Bill who took a long, refreshing draught. The bowl was then passed to Nuri and then to Annad who emptied it. A light breakfast followed and was eaten without ceremony. It consisted of cinnamon tea steaming hot in a heavy glass, a handful of dried dates and some breadflaps.

When they had finished, warriors of the sheik's bodyguard from the nearby tents came in quietly by twos and threes. As each one entered, he touched hand to forehead and with a low "Salaam Aleikum" (Peace be with you), seated himself on the sand. Presently some forty or fifty men had formed a semi-circle about the divan. Some of them lighted cigarettes, rolling their own with dexterity; others engaged in low-voiced conversation, but for the most part, they smoked and sat in silence. Then the sheik began to speak and all other talking ceased.

"Annad!" he said, leaning forward and touching the young fellow affectionately on the shoulder, "suppose you recount for all of us in detail what you told me briefly when you arrived here. Forget nothing. I want these men of the Beni Khelb to know what happened to you yesterday and this morning."

Arabs of the desert have the gift of story-telling and Annad proved his birthright by a truly interesting and exciting recital of his capture and the rescue. There was a tenseness in the atmosphere as the circle of warriors leaned forward so as to catch every word.

While the young sheik was speaking the slaves drew wide the curtains of the tent to catch whatever breeze was blowing. From where Bill sat he had an unobstructed view down the sandy hillside and over a rolling expanse which sparkled in the tropical sunshine.

At last Annad finished. The story of his adventures had held his hearers spellbound. The tribesmen sat unmoving, betraying not a hint of their inner excitement and wrath, except perhaps for the flash of an eye, the tightening of a clenched fist here and there among them. But the grim silence which hung over the assembly bode ill for the Beni Murra.

Mohammed Ibn now broke the silence. "Men of the Beni Khelb," he announced in clear ringing

tones, "you know now my reasons for adopting as my own sons, this young man, Beel Smeet and the boy Nuri, my blood cousin. Though young in years, they have proved brave warriors; and in beating off those dogs of the Beni Murra—saving Annad from a shameful death, they have placed me and every son of the Beni Khelb in a position of debt difficult to repay. Henceforth you will treat them with the love and respect that you accord me and my eldest-born Annad."

He then embraced both Billy and Nuri.

"My sons, your father is proud of you. What is mine is now yours as well."

Bill, who was not keen on all this demonstration, was glad when the sheik changed the subject.

"Do you care to tell us," he inquired, "how you happen to be in my country with an airplane? Have no fear of your words going further than this tent, my son," he encouraged when Billy hesitated. "What you may say to us—if it is a secret, will be kept secret."

Billy was doing some quick thinking. He knew that the Bedouin tribes are not so bigoted in their religion as the Arabs of the cities and from what he had heard he believed Mohammed Ibn to be an honorable man. The whole plan of rescue for Dr. Parker and his expedition depended now upon the help these tribesmen might lend, so without reserve, he took them into his confidence. Starting

with Dr. Parker's discovery of the oil wells, he told them frankly why he and his father had been commissioned to come to Arabia—recounted in detail their adventures since leaving America and ended by asking their help.

As he glanced hopefully at the faces about him, in order to see how the Beni Khelb were receiving his plea, he was met with an impassive silence—again the tribesmen displayed that stolidity which long years of discipline had enforced upon them.

Then spoke Mohammed Ibn. "My son—what you have told us is of great interest to me and to the Beni Khelb. What you ask of us to do is, on the other hand, a very serious matter and not to be undertaken or refused without grave consideration. Tomorrow I will give you your answer. In the meantime, take your rest, and sleep."

He waved his hand and without a word the tribesmen rose in a body, saluted and left the tent. Then, after seeing that his guests were made comfortable, the sheik also took his departure. As for Billy, Nuri and Annad, they simply curled up on their couches of soft rugs and fell asleep almost immediately.

It was late afternoon when the boys awoke and for some time they lay there gazing out over the desert. Presently the sheik and several of his principal men appeared and the lads got up, stretching and yawning.

In the desert, where water is precious and is usually carried in goatskins from distant wells, all-over bathing is unknown. The Bedouin lives his entire life without tub, shower or swim. They live next to the earth, sand, gravel, or sunbaked clay, and earth is a purifier, as are the wind and the sun. Bedouins are clean in their bodily habits as animals are clean. Where we use water as a cleanser, they use sand.

The three young fellows now stripped and going out into the sunshine, rubbed their hands, faces and bodies with clean, fine sand. Then a slave, with a tin teakettle, a towel thrown over his shoulder poured a little water for each of them into a bowl, with which they completed their ablutions. Feeling deliciously refreshed they returned to the tent and dressed.

Then dinner was brought in to the pavilion. Five slaves appeared bearing an immense brass platter fully five feet in diameter. They gripped it by iron rungs and set it on the sand in the center of a circle formed by the sheik and his guests who squatted on rugs placed for that purpose. The great dish contained the entire carcass of two sheep resting on a bed of rice and gravy. Folds upon folds of soft, thin breadflaps were draped around the platter's rim.

The severed head of the sheep had been set on

top of each carcass to show that it had been freshly killed and to indicate the kind of meat it was.

Knives, forks and spoons are unknown in the desert. The party seated around the dish ate with their right hands. Mohammed Ibn selected pieces of the liver which he handed to Bill and then tore off choice morsels of meat and laid them in a little pile before his principal guest.

Everyone ate the rice and gravy by scooping a whole handful into the palm. It was then tossed up and down in the air, over the platter, until a part of the gravy had trickled through the fingers leaving a ball of rice. This was immediately scooped out of the palm with the thumb of the same hand, balanced on thumb and forefinger and tossed into the mouth. Bill's awkward attempts to juggle his food this way provoked gales of good natured laughter from Nuri and Annad. Bedouins are naturally courteous, but when Bill nearly blinded himself with a misdirected ball of hot rice and gravy, even the sheik and his men smiled.

"Cheer up, son," laughed his host, while a black wiped the young American's face with a hand towel. "It was far more difficult for me when as a young man I traveled north to Constantinople and was brought in contact with knives and forks for the first time. It was at a big dinner given by the Sultan for some foreign lords. Knowing no better I kept shoveling food into my mouth with

a knife, and not doing it well, either—until I saw the other guests staring curiously at me. My crowning disgrace came at the end of the meal when gold fingerbowls were placed before us, filled with water in which a slice of lemon floated. Believing it to be a beverage I put the bowl to my lips, drained it, and ate the lemon—when to my mortification I saw then that the other men were dipping their fingers in the water and drying them on a napkin! Nobody, Beel, is born with knowledge—it must be acquired. You must not mind our mirth. Your manners are far better than either Nuri's or Annad's. Dexterity in handling our food will come with practice—be of good cheer, my son."

An Arab will no more think of licking his fingers or putting them in his mouth than would a cultured American. No finger bowls were used but when they had finished the meal the boys and their hosts went outside the tent and scrubbed their hands thoroughly with sand. The grease with which their right hands were covered to the wrists supplied a soapy moisture, and the process was completed without need of water. The dish was then taken to the farther end of the tent where the remainder of the sheik's warriors dined, and what remained was carried into the hareem for the women.

After drinking several cups of strong, black coffee they all walked over to where the Fokker

lay. The sheik and his head men showed unflagging interest in the big airbus as Billy gave them a detailed explanation of its mechanism.

"Would you care to go up, Sheik?" he asked. "She is pretty heavily loaded just now but I can take six or seven passengers."

"This is an experience I never thought to have," declared the head of the Beni Khelb, taking no pains to conceal his pleasure—"Yes, we shall be delighted to fly with you."

He thereupon chose six of his men and they piled into the cabin behind Bill. It was plain that these wild tribesmen thoroughly enjoyed this new thrill, and the whole village turned out to watch them make their flight, and appeared to enjoy it as much as the passengers in the plane. There was great excitement when Bill sent the big ship in a dive from five thousand feet, zoomed the sheik's pavilion, and, circling the other tents, landed near where they had taken off.

"By Allah the Compassionate and the Merciful! —that was a ride!" exclaimed the Sheik when he placed his feet on solid ground once more. "Beel, my son, I thought when we dropped that something had gone wrong and that we were on our way to death in a most disgusting form. Now I see it was to give us a thrill. . . . Well, you did just that. I have flirted with death more times than I can remember but never like this!"

Bill fastened the door of the cabin, and laughed.

"Practice breeds contempt," he said courteously. "After a hop or two you won't mind it. I must say that neither you nor these other gentlemen turned a hair. That is most unusual, sir. I gave you a stiff test."

"Ah, yes," said the sheik proudly, "we are Bedawi of the Beni Khelb—but what is this?" His tone changed as he turned to one of his escort. "Bissah! (Truly!) Yussef, you are as green in the face as grass by a river's brink. Surely it is not with fear?" he added sternly.

"No, Lord, not fear—*tobacco!*" Faintly uttered the man, who looked very ill indeed. "To chew the weed is soothing—but—when we fell like a star out of heaven. . . ."

"By all that is holy—he swallowed it!" shouted Mohammed Ibn, while the others doubled up with laughter.

"Indeed I find it no laughing matter," sighed Yussef. "With my Lord's permission I will now retire to my tent."

"There you see the result of bad habits," piped up Nuri, the irrepressible. "Chewing tobacco is a filthy vice, so is the smoking of cigarettes—I myself use tobacco only in a hookah (Arabian water pipe)," he finished virtuously.

"If I catch you using it in a hookah or any other form I'll be forced to use a horsewhip on you, you

young imp of Satan," threatened Mohammed Ibn fiercely, "—time enough for that when you're a grown man." Then he turned, and Bill saw a twinkle in his eye. "Come along to supper, boys. Flying has given me an appetite."

CHAPTER XIV

THE SHEIK DECIDES

"I WANT you to come with me this morning, Beel," the sheik said after breakfast next day "We'll ride out to one of my camel herds and talk on the way."

Awaiting them outside the tent they found two splendid Arabian horses, saddled and bridled. One of them, a beautiful chestnut, was held by a tribesman; the other, a shining black, seemingly as free as the desert air, walked up to the chief and began nosing his abba.

"He wants sugar," laughed the sheik, giving the handsome creature a lump, and caressing his fine, sleek head. "I call him 'Black Beauty' from a book I read in Constantinople years ago. After my family, he is my dearest possession. As you can see, he reciprocates my affection." The animal laid his head on Mohammed Ibn's shoulder in perfect content.

The tribesmen led the chestnut forward.

"This is Mazir (Little Whirlwind)," Mohammed Ibn continued, "Mazir is the swiftest steed in southern Arabia. His forefathers have carried my ancestors, father and son from time immemor-

ial. Treat him with kindness and he will love you —he is yours. No, do not thank me, son—give him this lump of sugar. That's right, talk to him—see, he has taken it, and now he wants to nose your cheek. We Bedawi love our horses, and they expect affection. They are proud as we Arabs are proud. Mazir knows there is no finer stock in the desert than the line he springs from. Be gentle with him and he will carry you until he drops."

For some minutes longer Billy patted and talked to his Arabian steed. Then he and the sheik sprang into their saddles and dashed away at an amazing speed. Crossing the shallow Wady Dauasir, they turned to the left and cantered toward a low range of hills to the northward. Presently they reined in and went forward at a smart trot. Billy was delighted with the sheik's princely present. He would have been happier had he not been worried about gaining Mohammed Ibn's assistance in his project for rescuing Dr. Parker. He thought of this, and wondered whether his father and the swordmaker had escaped the Grand Shereef in Mecca—and his heart grew heavy. Suddenly the sheik called to him:

"Ride by my side, son," he suggested. And when Bill had drawn rein, "That is better; now we can speak without shouting, Beel." Then, after a short silence, he continued: "I am going to give you the help you asked for. . . ." And as Bill's face lighted up and he began to speak, "No, do not interrupt.

I am in your debt—I want no thanks. If things go our way I shall not be a loser, for the wells you speak of and which I did not know existed, must lie in the hills to the south and eastward, in that disputed territory claimed by both the Beni Khelb and the Beni Murra. The letter which you tell me you are carrying to Dr. Parker must be his authorization to purchase or lease these wells. The French have probably told the Beni Murra that he expects to take them by force—or something of that sort—in order that they themselves may control the oil output. The fact of the matter is that the French have combined with my enemies. Why should I not aid you? But Dr. Parker's position must be almost impregnable. The Beni Murra alone can place fourteen thousand men in the field and the French must have several hundred there. Anything but the strongest natural defences would have fallen long ago. There is in those hills a high valley, surrounded by unscalable precipices. I have heard that there is a lake in this valley. Its only entrance is a narrow cleft in the mountains which leads down to a low-bowl-like depression beyond the stone ramparts. This is in turn separated from the desert by a rocky ridge. Dr. Parker and his men must be in the high valley by the lake."

"You must be right," replied Bill. "Somehow the picture I had of him and his men besieged on the hot sands of a flat desert seemed hardly in

accord with the fact that Zeid's message carried the belief that they could hold out some weeks longer."

"He is in some mountain fastness," declared the sheik. "That may be a help to us—and again it may not. Yesterday, two men left here on racing camels to reconnoiter. Last night, after I had fully considered, messengers were sent to my sub-chiefs who, as you must realize, are scattered over a large territory, to arm for battle and come with their men to a specified spot in the desert. We are not far from this point, and will start tomorrow night. Tonight I have other matters in view. A reprisal raid against the Beni Murra for trying to kill Annad. That insult must be avenged before we go on with the other affair. Tomorrow, after we have rested, for tonight we shall be in the saddle, I will outline my plan of campaign. Now let us try to forget these things for a time. I have brought you up here to see my white camels. There is no finer stock in all Arabia or anywhere in the world."

While the sheik was talking, their horses had carried them over a series of ridges or low hills and now they came out upon a wide plateau covered with long, coarse grass. As they rode over the brow, Bill was astonished to see a huge herd of camels grazing—there must have been over a thousand of them, and all in the charge of one old man and a little camel boy.

They dismounted and leaving the horses to

wander as they pleased, walked over toward the herd to get a closer view. The sheik was enormously proud of them and took no pains to hide it. His voice rang with enthusiasm as he exclaimed to Bill:

"Splendid animals, aren't they? Every one pure white, long and clean of limb—and see how graceful their necks, how small and well-formed their heads. You have never seen camels like these, I am sure. And they are as intelligent, as loyal and affectionate as the finest horses," he assured Bill. "We Bedawi call our country 'The Mother of the Camel,' you know."

Billy nodded. "They're swell-looking beasts, all right. Will you tell me more about camels, Sheik? I know something of horses, boats, airplanes, but camels are about as scarce in my country as snow-shovels are in yours. I've never seen white ones before. Are there many species of camel?"

The sheik seemed pleased at Bill's interest. "There are six species in Central Arabia, son, from whence come the finest breeds. Arabian camels have but one hump. Most Arabs have never heard of the two-humped variety. They are found only in Central Asia to the northwest of Persia, chiefly in the Gobi Desert. The two-humped breed is slow and of little use except as a beast of burden."

"They're called dromedaries, aren't they?"

"No, the one-humped camel is the dromedary. It's a Greek word meaning camel-that-runs. The chief unit of wealth in Arabia is the camel. In your country you say a man is worth so many dollars. Here we say he is worth so many camels. Our very existence depends upon the camel. Not only do we use him as a beast of burden, we drink his milk, use his hair for making cloth and when he becomes old—you will taste camel steak tonight and see how good it is!"

"How fast can they go?" asked Billy.

"First class dromedaries can trot up to twenty-one miles an hour, canter up to twenty-eight, and gallop up to thirty-two miles an hour. Racing stock like this herd can go even faster. They can eat anything that grows in the desert and they can drink twenty gallons of water at a time but it lasts them a long time. Now—" the sheik laughed, "the lecture is over. And we must go back and rest. There'll be no sleep tonight, son. But I wanted you to see my white children, for tonight you will ride one."

Bill was naturally curious about the sheik's plans for the night but he knew that he would probably be enlightened later, and Mohammed Ibn was a personage one did not question with impunity.

"I know that you must be frightfully worried about your other father, Beel," said the Chief as they ambled slowly back toward the black tents.

"Yesterday I sent a trusted man to Mecca. He will find out all he can there, and await our coming. For if all goes well I intend flying to the Holy City with you just as soon as this oil well affair is settled."

Bill was struck dumb at this disclosure of the sheik's kindly anxiety on his father's behalf. The fact that his father's life was in danger, his fate unknown and that he was powerless to aid him, had been a nightmare to Bill for days. He felt an overwhelming relief and gratitude to the sheik for the action he proposed to take.

"Mohammed Ibn," he said at last, his voice shaking with sincerity, "words are of no avail—I do not know how to thank you—"

The sheik rode closer to him. "There, my boy —" he smiled sympathetically, "say no more—you saved my eldest born—some day I may be able to render you a service which will equal the balance."

After the meal at midday at which Bill ate his first camel steak, and ate it with relish—practically the entire male population of the camp lay down and slept. At four the lads were awakened and after another meal of breadflaps, dates and coffee they set about arming themselves for the work ahead.

At first the chief had forbidden Nuri to accompany the raiding party. But the youngster showed

his disappointment so keenly that his cousin relented.

"You're too young for this kind of thing," declared the sheik. "However, all true Bedawi are men from the time they can ride. If Annad can find his small rifle—and if you promise to keep near me—"

But Nuri had already given the big man a hug and darted off to find Annad and the rifle.

"Here are rifle, automatic and a long knife for you, Beel," went on Mohammed Ibn, with a despairing shrug as the excited Nuri disappeared. "Now come out, for we have far to ride and must be starting."

CHAPTER XV

A RAID IN THE NIGHT

OUTSIDE the pavilion a hundred Beni Khelb warriors mounted on racing camels were lined up four ranks deep in the hot afternoon sunshine. All were armed with rifles and each man wore two cartridge belts slung over his shoulders like double Sam Browne belts. The belt around his waist under his abba held a curved sword and an automatic revolver.

As the sheik appeared with Billy, Annad came running up with Nuri, who shouldered a miniature rifle with all the pride of a grenadier. Four saddled camels were now led up and forced to kneel while Billy looked on with pardonable misgivings.

"Never ridden a camel before, have you?" asked Mohammed Ibn.

"No, sir," replied Billy.

"That's all right—you'll soon learn that it is much easier and more comfortable than riding a horse."

"I hope so. . . ." Bill inspected the broad rug-covered saddle, whose wooden frame and long wooden saddle-pommels, front and back, looked quite capable of breaking one's back or piercing

one's stomach if the beast became unruly. "I'd certainly hate to make a fool of myself," he added.

"Oh, you won't—" declared the sheik. "Now sit on the saddle—that's right, sit side-saddle and hold the front pommel firmly in the bend of your right leg—Fine!—Now lock your right instep loosely under your left heel. That's the way—the folds of your abba are swathed so—about your legs, and here is your camel stick." He passed over a light, knobbed bamboo stick about four feet long which Bill hung on his wrist by its leather thong. The camel had no bit or bridle, only a halter with a rope tied loosely to the saddle pommel.

"Now I am going to mount my own camel," explained the sheik, "—watch me and then do exactly the same."

Bill watched while Mohammed Ibn mounted his kneeling camel and brought the creature to its feet. Then, in accordance with the sheik's instructions, he cried *"Dhai!"* (*"Rise!"*) and tapped his mount gently under the chin with the bamboo. Things began to happen immediately. The camel's front part heaved upward several feet while his back part remained stationary. Bill clung to the pommel at an angle of forty-five degrees. The beast had straightened its upper forelegs with its knees still in the sand. Then the camel's back heaved with a double movement to its full height, and Billy pitched forward with the angle reversed. Like a

jack-knife its front legs opened and Bill was restored to the horizontal. The feeling of elevation was prodigious and he thanked his lucky stars he was safely up.

"Pretty good for the first time," commented the sheik. "You regulate the gait by kicking inward with the heel—a light kick means walk, a sharper one trot—and a light tatto means run!"

Then turning to the assembled ranks of tribesmen he waved his arm, and shouted *"Yahh!"* (*"Go!"*).

Thereupon the party moved forward at a walk. This is the gait which occasionally produces seasickness, a steady backward and forward lurch which Bill found anything but comfortable. He found himself riding beside the sheik; directly behind them came Annad and Nuri; while to the rear the tribesmen strung out in a long line, two by two.

"Trot!" ordered Mohammed Ibn, and Bill dug in his heel, guiding his mount by light taps of the camel-stick on the sides of the neck.

Trotting proved a much easier pace—far easier in fact than that of the average horse. The full run which the column soon broke into was sheer marvel.

"It's like flying with the wind!" Bill shouted enthusiastically.

"I thought you'd like it," returned the sheik.

"But save your own wind, boy, you'll need it presently—we've got a long ride ahead."

For fully two hours the cavalcade traveled south, now at a trot and then again they would swing forward on the dead run, the long legs of the camels moving back and forth with the untiring regularity of giant pistons. Bill soon became accustomed to the motion, and the farther he rode, the more he enjoyed this new adventure. At first he wondered why the sheik had chosen racing camels rather than horses on this raid into an enemy country. Now he realized that though a horse might win a short race, no steed ever foaled could keep up this steady speed mile after mile, hour after hour.

As they rode, the topography of the country changed continually. They had been following the almost dry bed of the Wady Dauasir toward its source. Now they trotted over sand-dunes, then came a long stretch of hard-baked clay in which grew cactus and coarse desert grasses. Bill was further amazed that neither on the hardest sun-baked clay or desert gravel did the feet of the camels make the slightest sound. The heat of the sun was intense, the glare blinding, and he was not sorry when the sun dropped over the horizon, and suddenly it was night.

For some time on their journey Bill had noticed magnificent ridges of white and red sand-

stone stretching out eastward. At a signal from the sheik, the train swerved and left the narrow Wady behind. The camels were soon scrambling over boulders and pushing their way through thousands of oleander bushes that spread out between them and the ridges. Beyond came a bare stretch of gravel and shingle, until at last they were mounting higher and higher in the hills. It was slow going over this rough country and the pitching walk of Bill's camel gave him an uncomfortable sensation in the pit of his stomach.

After pushing their way over the second and higher ridge Mohammed Ibn halted his men and Bill drew up beside him. Guttural commands of "Ikh—ikh" (Kneel—kneel) were heard down the line. The camels obeyed in their usual pitch-and-toss manner, their riders dismounted and stretched their cramped legs. Beyond in the starlight wave after wave of rolling sand-dune met the eye. It was bitterly cold and Bill was thankful for the warm comfort of his heavy abba.

"I never thought I'd be seasick in the middle of the Arabian desert," he answered when the sheik inquired how he felt. "At the trot and the run or canter I'm O.K., but I'd rather take sixty tight loops in a plane as a passenger than ride one of these seagoing desert schooners sixty minutes at a walk!"

Mohammed Ibn and the boys laughed heartily at Bill's mournful air.

"Be of good cheer—the first hundred miles are the hardest," encouraged the sheik. "You'll soon get used to the motion. Eat a few dates from your bag on your pommel, and you'll feel better."

He put a silver whistle to his lips and blew one short blast. This was evidently a known signal for the tribesmen left their mounts peacefully chewing the cud, and immediately gathered in a circle around the sheik and his sons.

"Warriors of the Beni Khelb," began Mohammed Ibn in his fine, deep voice, "tonight we will wipe out the insult given our tribe by the Beni Murra. Had it not been for my adopted sons, Annad would have been executed. But remember—this is a raid for plunder. Leave women and children alone. Most of the men have gone into the eastern desert with their chiefs fighting for the French farengis. You will meet them later. Should they resent our intrusion this evening—" the sheik shrugged, his tone was full of menace, "you are sons of the Beni Khelb—and we have our arms."

A few minutes later, the whole cavalcade had mounted and was on its way again.

For fully an hour and a half longer they traversed the sand hills at a smart trot. Then as they swept over a crest, looking to Bill much like the others they had crossed, the sheik raised his hand

and halted the riders. Motioning Bill to accompany him, he rode forward until it was possible to see over the top of the next rise.

A sparsely grassed plateau met Bill's gaze. Misled at first by the shadowy starlight, he thought the place empty; then it came to him that what he had taken for large boulders spread over the plain were in reality, camels, hundreds of them, herded together, sleeping.

"I am giving you the post of honor, Beel," whispered Mohammed Ibn. "Leave your camel here with mine—they won't stray. Now follow me—and above all, come quietly."

Noiselessly as desert wraiths the two slipped over the ridge and down on the herd. As he followed, Bill realized the sheik was making for a small tent at the right of the sleeping camels. Presently they were crawling on hands and knees, dragging their rifles beside them. Without warning the sheik dropped forward and lay hugging the ground. Bill hastily followed suit, wondering the reason for it. He had not long to wait. Something —an animal, Bill thought, was moving on the outskirts of the herd. It looked about the size of a young calf—and had turned suspiciously in their direction. Then he saw that it was a great dog, probably a mastiff, and coming straight for them. Bill felt a tingling down his spine. Everything going fine, and now this. . . . What chance would they

have if the dog barked and awakened the herders in the tent? A rifle was of no use in an emergency like this—the sound of a shot would spoil everything. . . . All this flashed through Bill's mind in one tense second.

Then as the brute dashed toward them, the sheik raised his hand and flung something in the dog's path. Billy saw the animal stop, sniff and gulp down the meat he had found. He took two or three bounds and dropped over on his side. When the sheik and Billy reached him, he was dead.

"I hate to poison a good dog," whispered the sheik sadly. "But there was no other way out of it. Come along now and be as quiet as possible."

The tent's flap was open, and as they peered within, they could just make out the figure of a man lying asleep on a pile of rugs. The sheik drew forth two short lengths of rope and a gag from beneath his abba. These he handed to Bill and with a finger to his lips, tiptoed into the tent. Bill saw him crouch, then fling himself upon the sleeping herdsman. Came a short, fierce struggle and Mohammed Ibn rose to his feet.

"I have stunned him," he explained, "now we'll tie him up and get to work. It serves him right," he went on, "he was asleep at his post. I had expected to find two of them. The other fellow is probably spending the night with his family down in the valley."

After the man had been bound and gagged, the two left him where he lay, and went outside. With quickened step they walked back over the hill to where they had left their kneeling camels. The sheik blew sharply on his whistle and motioned Bill to mount. By the time the camels had risen to their feet the rest of the cavalcade had come up. No word was spoken. Mohammed Ibn simply pointed forward and the camels moved on and over the top of the hill.

At the tent, ten of the tribesmen, together with an unwilling Nuri, broke away from the party to round up and drive off the herd of camels. For some time the others sat silently watching them. Then, satisfied that all was well, the chief gave the order to advance once more.

Two by two they trotted across the plain and down a narrow valley. At a distance Bill could discern the dark shapes of forty or fifty tents silhouetted in the starlight. Half-way down the gully, they stopped and held a short conference while rifles were unslung and revolvers loosened in their holsters.

Billy was tingling with eagerness. Even the camels seemed to have caught the excitement. They strained at their guiding ropes, gave utterance to queer groans and gurglings, and pawed the sand in their impatience to be off.

There came a last sharp whistle from the sheik.

The straining camels swept forward and with shouts of "Allah! Allah!" the horde of attacking Bedouins charged down the valley.

Awakened by these bold cries, the village came to life. The black tents poured forth dozens of armed men. The terror stricken screams of the women and children, the hoarse shouts of the men, and the roar and crack of rifle fire made a bedlam of the night. Before he knew it, Bill found himself in the midst of the melee. Men were fighting all around him. Camels were down, kicking and biting friend and foe alike in the death agonies. Tents rocked and capsized in the darkness. The din and disorder were prodigious. No longer a well-planned charge against the sleeping enemy—it was a hand-to-hand conflict—man against man.

The spirit of the fight got into Bill. He fired point-blank at a grinning face before him—the distorted features seemed to fade into the darkness, and another figure took its place. Bill's rifle jammed. Fighting for his life, he caught it by the heated barrel and swinging it above his head aimed a blow at the enemy Arab. In another instant Bill felt his camel lurch forward and stagger to his knees. Quickly he slipped his leg from the pommel and jumped, landing on hands and knees in the sand. He was up again at once, but his rifle was gone. A man jumped on his back, trying to down him, but Billy swerved about and grasping

him about the middle, swung him up and into the belly of another who rushed him from the front. Forgotten was the revolver in his holster, the long knife in his belt. He was fighting now as a primitive man fights, striking out with both fists, surrounded by a mob of shrieking foes.

Subconsciously he wondered where the sheik, Annad, the rest of the Beni Khelb were. Then this little eddy in the stream of battle rushed forward and swept over him. A blinding pain shot through the back of his head—and Billy knew no more.

CHAPTER XVI

IN THE HANDS OF THE BENI MURRA

When Billy awoke he felt dizzy and sick and his head throbbed as though a thousand small hammers were beating the top of his skull. Opening his eyes he looked about him. Above was the black roof of a Bedouin tent, but the sides had been drawn back and in the dazzling light of an Arabian noontide he could see other black tents and Bedouins, both male and female passing between. Naked children played in the sand, while Arab dogs searched for fleas and snoozed in the shade of the tents. Gradually through Billy's memory filtered the scene of the night raid and the fight in the village street.

"I'm right bang in the middle of the Beni Murra encampment," he thought despairingly, and sat up to get a better view of his surroundings. The movement made him giddy and he closed his eyes in pain. When he opened them again, he saw that he was sitting on the earthen floor of the tent. He moved his arms and legs cautiously to see if they were whole, and wondered why he had not been bound. A glance downward gave him the reason. Around his lower leg was a heavy iron anklet

and shackled to it an iron chain about three feet in length whose farther end was securely fastened to a tent post.

"Sorry I've brought you to this, Beel," said a deep voice behind him.

Billy turned to see the sheik sitting on the floor and shackled as he was to another post several yards away.

"Mohammed Ibn!" he cried. "How did you get here?"

The sheik smiled grimly.

"Very much the same way that you did, son," he replied, and pointed to a blood-stained rag which was bound about his head. "I think it is what you call bad luck. This morning I learned from our captors that several hundred Beni Murra warriors stopped the night here on their way to join the army which surrounds Dr. Parker in the mountains. Most of them have now ridden after my men in an effort to get back their camels. However, I haven't any fears of their being successful. Annad is sure to have sent men ahead to bring up reinforcements."

"Then there is a chance of our being rescued, sheik?"

"Don't count on it, Beel. While you were unconscious, a son of their sheik who is in command informed me that when he gets back with his camels this afternoon, we are to be ceremoniously

tortured, then executed. That is why our throats are not cut now—it is as it might have been with Annad—this is a time of rejoicing for the Beni Murra. Mohammed Ibn spoke bitterly, his eyes on the ground, and Bill had no word with which to answer him.

After a short silence, Bill exclaimed, half to himself, "If I only had a drink of water—"

"There's a gourd full beside you," pointed out his friend. "Help yourself—it's no part of their plan to torture us with thirst. They want us in the best condition possible for their afternoon's entertainment."

Bill took a long drink from the gourd, and the water, though warm and stale, tasted to him like nectar. Greatly refreshed and feeling less groggy, he turned to the sheik again.

"Is an—an execution the usual thing if one is caught raiding?" he asked, a little unsteadily. Life is sweet when one is young, and although Bill was no coward the thought of undergoing Arab torture made his blood run cold. "I thought," he continued, "that Bedouin prisoners, if not killed in the heat of battle, were generally made slaves."

"That is true," Mohammed Ibn answered, "but this case is a different one. As you know, there has been a blood feud between our tribes for centuries. Quarter is never asked nor given between the Beni Khelb and the Beni Murra," he ended proudly.

Bill was silent for several moments. Then, "I'll do my best not to disgrace the Beni Khelb," he muttered at last, as though he had unwittingly spoken his thoughts.

The sheik, who was lying with his eyes closed, heard the words and raised his head. "You're a brave lad, Beel," he declared. "We are in the hands of Allah, son. Sleep a little, if you can, and gain strength for the ordeal. Weakness makes a woman of a man."

Bill lay down again but the earthen floor of the tent was hard, and his head ached abominably. Moreover he was stiff and sore and in no condition to go peacefully to sleep. He envied Mohammed Ibn, who with the fatality and faith of his race had placed himself in the hands of his God, and whose regular breathing proclaimed that for the time being he had lost his troubles in slumber.

For a while Bill watched the busy life of the encampment, or rather that small part of it to be seen through the open tent. With an effort he turned his thoughts from his father—probably a prisoner or worse in a Mecca dungeon. He had no real hope that Mr. Smith, badly wounded, had been able to escape the Grand Shereef's soldiers. And again his hands were tied—and death awaited him just when assistance had been offered for his father's rescue.

Without the tent great bluebottles hummed and

the heat was more than ever stifling. For the first time he noticed their guard sound asleep in a shaded corner with his rifle beside him. Evidently the man had no fear that his shackled prisoners could make their escape from the center of an Arab encampment teeming with life. Billy had to admit to himself that there was no hope—that the inevitable must take its course.

Gradually the noise without quieted down. The shouts of the village children at play and the continual yapping of Arab curs died away. Now only an occasional Arab passed the tent, and Bill realized that the Beni Murra had settled down for their noonday siesta.

Presently, a small girl came out of the hareem of the tent opposite. She wore a bedraggled gown of rusty black, much too big for her, which trailed on the sand. In one hand she carried a metal dish piled with breadflaps, in the other a tin cup of steaming coffee. The girl crossed the sandy track, stumbling over her long robe, and came on toward their tent.

"Here comes our guard's lunch," thought Billy. "I could do with something to eat, myself. Funny, I never knew how hungry I was until that kid came along with chow for somebody else!"

Into the tent marched the girl and Billy watched her movements greedily. He saw her place the food on the sand beside the guard without troubling to

rouse the man. Then he saw her glance up and down the empty street. Next, without a look in his direction, she bent over the Arab and Billy thought she meant to wake her lover with a kiss, when he saw her hand dart within her gown. The hand reappeared almost directly, and Bill got the surprise of his life—for the girl now held a revolver gripped by its barrel. Up flashed her arm, then down. There came a dull thud and the guard rolled limply over on his back. With a single glance at her victim, he sprang to the side of the tent and let drop the wall curtains. Then, as she walked toward Bill, she drew back the cashmere shawl which covered her head, disclosing a bright little face with snapping black eyes and a red-lipped mouth parted in the widest of grins.

"Nuri!" Bill almost shouted. "How on earth did *you* get here?"

The boy laughed infectiously, and wrung Billy's hand.

"Himself in the flesh, Beel," chuckled the imp, "and I got here by walking, thank you—and mighty hot walking it was in these beastly clothes. Why anyone should want to be a woman—! But there's my second father. . . . Hello, sheik! Will you embrace a long-lost daughter?"

"Hello, you imp!" Mohammed Ibn's deep voice was husky as he drew the boy to him. "Tell me, did you kill that guard?"

"I don't think so, sir—merely stunned him. But I'll stick a knife between his ribs, if you say so?"

"No, I don't think it's necessary, you bloodthirsty young villain! Go over there and search him. If he hasn't got the keys to these shackles, you had better get out as fast as you came in. Someone's likely to drop in and hand you an invitation for the entertainment later on. But without those keys Beel and I can't move."

"Oh, he's got them all right," declared Nuri, confidently.

"How do you know?"

"Found out before I came in here—I didn't dress up in women's clothes for fun!" He went over to the man and fumbled in his abba. "Yes—here they are, sheik." He tossed them across the sand. "Unlock yourselves, gentlemen, and dig into that food. I have a date across the way—in the hareem yonder. I'll be back in a minute or two and then I'll show you how we're going to get out of this place."

He strutted out of the tent and the side curtain dropped behind him.

"Smart little gamin," commented the sheik, as he unlocked their fetters. "But I love him, in spite of his impudence. There's no telling where he has gone now, but we can be sure it is part of his plan to get us out of here. What he means to do, I don't know, for if anyone sees us we'll be shackled again in quick shape. At night we might have a chance,

but in the bright light of day—I confess he has me guessing."

Billy and the sheik had finished the coffee and the last of the breadflaps when Nuri nonchalantly made his appearance once more. This time he carried an oblong box of polished wood, balanced on his head.

"*Where* did you get that?" inquired the sheik.

Nuri placed the box on the floor, and bringing forth a small key from his gown, unlocked it.

"The lady over the way has been keeping it for me," he explained.

"The lady over the way?" repeated his foster-father.

"Yes—and not so bad looking at that. I told her I was the wife of the young sheik—these suburban females are so trusting!"

"But where did you get it?"

"In the young sheik's hareem along with this garment I'm wearing—where else?"

"Allah be merciful!—the lad has stolen the lady's wardrobe as well!" sputtered Mohammed Ibn, for Nuri had opened the box, and was bringing to view several similar dresses.

"You certainly are the one and only desert Raffles," laughed Bill.

"Never heard of him," said Nuri, "but if the lady wants to go walking this afternoon, she'll have to do so in a rug! She was sleeping when I

paid my visit. When our friend across the way asked embarrassing questions, I told her it was my hope chest—I guess it is," he grinned, "look at this!"

He had produced a small bag of soft leather from beneath the dresses and now cascaded a glittering stream of brilliant unset stones into his lap. For a breathless moment they stared at the little heap of rubies, diamonds and emeralds before them—then the sheik broke into a gale of mirth.

"By the Seven Hairs of the Prophet's Beard! He's stolen a fortune!" cried the sheik in his glee. "Nuri, my son, truly thou art a Bedouin of Bedouins." He gave the boy another hug and suddenly changed his tone.

"We are wasting time—put away your pretties, son, and while we are getting into these women's clothes, tell Beel and myself what you plan to do."

"Oh, as to the plan—it is quite simple. You make bundles of your own clothes which you carry on your heads when we go out of here. You see the crowd that arrived here yesterday, those we fought last night, brought their women with them, so there are plenty of strangers in town. Beel and and I will have our headshawls open, but you, sir, had better close yours to the eyes. The Beni Murra are stupid, Allah knows—but if they saw that one of their women had grown a beard like yours,

sheik, they would probably stick a knife into all three of us."

"You are an insolent puppy," growled Mohammed Ibn, struggling with the intricacies of unfamiliar garments. "And after we are out, where do we go?"

"We walk through the village toward the south. Should anyone speak to us, which is not likely, we are on our way to bring extra clothes to our men at the horsecamp. There is one, located about half a mile out of camp, southward. Annad, who is safe, by the way, never got a scratch last night,—is parked behind some rocks just beyond. It was his job to steal horses for us."

"Not such an easy one—in broad daylight," commented the sheik. "I hope he hasn't had too much trouble. It would be heartbreaking to fail at this stage of the game."

"Nuri didn't fail, so why should Annad?" queried Bill. "We can hope for the best, anyway."

"That's right, Beel." Nuri moved toward the door. "Everybody ready?—Too bad I can't take that defunct guard's gun—we are quite likely to need it before we get home—but ladies must be ladies—come—we've talked enough—let's go!"

"We have indeed," affirmed the sheik, dryly "Nuri, you go first—you know the way."

CHAPTER XVII

THE GETAWAY

BILLY and his two companions passed out of the tent and into the irregular village street. They met few people, for this was the hour of siesta. Those they passed simply saw three women of the tribe carrying bundles of clothing on their heads.

Following Nuri, they strolled along as though time were no object. But once they had passed the limit of the black tents, the Arab lad quickened the pace.

Bill walked along quietly, making no attempt to converse. His mind was busy enough, however. What did Nuri propose doing when they reached the horsecamp which he could see ahead? How could Annad possibly steal four horses from a well-guarded herd in broad daylight? These and other pertinent questions bothered him. He still felt shaky, and he had a beastly headache. No use trying to think. Much better to stop worrying and follow this Arab gamin blindly. Thus deciding, Bill felt better, and balancing his bundle, he trudged along in Nuri's wake.

Presently they turned to the right, and Bill saw their leader disappear. He simply sank out of

sight. A moment later the sheik and Billy had breasted a slight rise, and looked over a steep bank into the bed of a Wady whose winding course had cut a deep swathe in the rolling desert. Far below by the trickling stream that ran sluggishly along the middle of this almost dry river bed, stood Nuri, stripping himself of his women's clothes.

He grinned up at them. "Come on in, the water's fine!" he called.

"It looks it!" grunted Bill. Tossing the bundle of clothes before him, he took a running jump which landed him part way down the steep bank, knee-deep in an avalanche of sand. As he landed, he lost his balance and went flying downward, head over heels to bring up beside Nuri and his bundle, none the worse for this desert chute-the-chute. As he stood up, the sheik, who had been just behind, catapulted into him, and the two fell into the stream.

That water was thoroughly refreshing, and though a bit brackish to the taste, Bill gulped down great mouthfuls.

"Hurry up!" piped Nuri. "Beel, please get out of the water. Here's where we leave the women's clothing behind. Do make haste and change. Someone may walk into that tent and discover your escape at any time."

With all possible speed the three discarded the

costumes they were wearing and put on their own clothes once more.

"Where now?" asked Billy when they were ready to go on again.

"Straight up this Wady," the small Arab answered, taking the lead. "These banks are so steep and so near together that unless someone happens to be walking along the edge, we shall be well hidden."

"Where is Annad?" the sheik questioned Nuri as they hurried along the narrow gully.

Nuri pointed ahead and to the right. "Over there behind some rocks on the hillside, across the Wady from the horsecamp, sheik. If our plan works we may find him down here in the Wady."

"And the horses?" asked Bill.

Nuri turned impatiently.

"Questions—always questions, Beel!" he shot back with a comical sarcasm. "I've got you this far, my Lord of the farengi—if Allah has been kind Annad will have the horses with him."

Bill said nothing. Although Nuri was a bit cheeky and took advantage of the situation to order them about without explanation, the boy's unvarnished criticism of his attitude forced him to realize his own nervousness. But only a short while ago he had felt the iron shackles on his leg, and had a foretaste of the horrid doom which awaited him. And he had no desire to be recaptured. Never-

theless, he was grateful to Nuri, and the boy must know what he was doing. Just then he felt a light touch on his arm.

"I'm awfully sorry I spoke so, Beel," Nuri's voice was contrite. "After your experience today, I know you're feeling rotten. Forgive me. . . ."

Bill patted his shoulder. "That's all right, Nuri—" he began, when Mohammed Ibn interrupted.

"Come along, you two. This is no play of children. To business, now—both of you."

With a grip of the hand the lads ran on again. As they rounded a turn in the Wady, they stopped short and flung themselves flat on the ground. Just ahead a Bedouin warrior had appeared on the gulley's edge. He was riding a horse bareback, and as they watched with bated breath he jumped the animal down the steep bank. Behind on a long leading rope which the rider held came three other steeds and the four went plunging down the sandy declivity to bring up shortly at the brink of the stream.

"Now we're in for it," thought Billy, doing his best to make himself small as he crouched behind a stunted desert shrub, expecting every moment to see the Arab reach for his rifle.

It was apparent that the Bedouin had discovered them, for he stared toward the huddled group, his hand raised to shade his eyes from the glare of the

sun. Suddenly he threw up his arm and beckoned. Yes, Bill distinctly heard him call.

"Great guns! It's Annad himself!" he rejoiced, scrambling to his feet. "That lad's surely got nerve —riding off with those horses in broad daylight. I wonder how he managed it!"

He raced on with the others to where the four horses were sucking up the tepid water of the stream.

"I've been watering horses from the camp in batches of four the last couple of hours," explained Annad when hurried greetings were over. "You'll have to ride them bareback with a halter, but they'll serve our purpose, I think. And we've no time to waste. The man in charge of the camp will expect me back for another batch in a few minutes."

Leading their unwilling steeds across the stream, the party climbed the opposite bank and mounted. Before them lay a rocky hillside in full view of the horsecamp half a mile away. The inevitable happened while they were urging their horses up the steep incline. Faint shouts were heard from the camp and then Bill's horse shied as a steelcapped bullet smacked into a boulder nearby and went ricochetting along the hillside with a sharp whistling sound.

"Lead the horses and zigzag up to the top!" shouted the sheik, sliding to earth.

The rough ground and the steep incline of the hillside made fast going an impossibility, but the four wound their way upward at a slow trot, punctuated by rifle shots and the sharp ping of bullets among the boulders. To run up a hillside pulling a horse behind one is the most violent kind of exercise. Soon all four were dripping with perspiration. Their breath came in great gasps, and their heads swam, but still they kept doggedly on. Presently the sheik made a halt, and Bill sank down behind a convenient rock, winded and half blinded with sweat.

It seemed but a moment before he heard the shout to get moving again. A hurried glance down the hill told him that the Beni Murra were after them with a vengeance. Fully a hundred horsemen were spurring their steeds down the steep banks of the Wady. Another few minutes of pulling and panting, his heart going like a trip-hammer, and he had reached the top. For a second or two he leaned against the heaving sides of his Arab, impervious alike to whistling bullets overhead and Mohammed Ibn's frantic orders to mount.

At last with herculean effort he half sprang, half scrambled onto the creature's back, and digging his heels into the animal's sides, galloped after the others.

They were now crossing a plain which stretched on and out toward the setting sun. To their right

lay high ridges, and beyond, the valley through which they had ridden into the village the night before.

"How about direction?" called Annad, who was leading.

"Keep straight ahead, son," his father answered. "This way those behind us will have the sun in their eyes—that is the only reason they didn't shoot us down on the hillside. We've still got more than an hour of daylight. When it is dark we'll turn northward and try to lose them in the ridge country. Now it's a question of riding and keeping our lead.—Pray Allah they don't get our proper range and wing one of us!"

By the time their pursuers had topped the hillside, the four had gained a lead of fully a mile. With hard riding they bettered even this, by the time the sun dropped over the horizon and night with tropic suddenness overspread the desert. Mohammed Ibn then pointed his horse in the direction of the north star, setting a course at right angles to the one they had been following. The animals were pulled down to a gentle trot, as the party concluded that they had been successful in putting the enemy off their track. When they had placed two of the rolling hills between them and the plain, the sheik drew a halt.

"These beasts have done nobly," he remarked as he swung himself to the ground. "It will soon be

freezing cold, so let's give them a quick rubdown. They'll go all the better for it later on."

"Where do we go from here?" inquired Bill, as following Mohammed Ibn's lead he ripped off a piece of his under-robe and set to work, wiping down the sweating flanks of his horse.

"We've got to be on the lookout for that Beni Murra party—the one the young sheik has taken to search for his camels," volunteered Annad.

Nuri straightened his back and laughed. "Great chance that lad has of discovering his camels," he chuckled, "Anybody stupid enough to leave a fortune in precious stones with a woman, especially an old one who snores deserves losing a thousand camels. I'll bet you half the stones to a lame donkey, Annad, that when the reinforcements come up, we'll hear that our fellows got half of his men—If that bird's head wasn't nailed to his shoulders, he'd—"

But at this point in Nuri's harangue, Mohammed Ibn cut him short. "Stop that chatter, you youngsters, he insisted sharply, "it's time to ride now. If we meet the Beni Murra party, it is in Allah's hands. Pray to the Merciful One that we do not, Nuri, if you would busy your tongue. If we do meet them, we shall fare sadly—with one rifle and an automatic between the four of us."

Through long hours of darkness the weary riders urged their flagging steeds forward. Not-

withstanding the thick abbas they wore, the chill desert wind cut to the bone. Bill's throat was parched for lack of water, and he felt a dizzy faintness that bespoke his need of food. But he said no word of his discomfort to the others; they were doubtless accustomed to this sort of hardship, and he would not for worlds have them suspect his weakness.

They saw no sign of the Beni Murra or any other human beings, until they came to within four or five miles of Wady Dauasir. Then as they topped a low rise, they spied several regiments of Arab horsemen spread out over the sandy plain, riding directly toward them.

Bill pulled up his jaded horse and stared with the others.

"If that's the old woman's husband and his crew, we are certainly out of luck," observed Nuri. "My horse can scarcely trot, much less run."

Mohammed Ibn, whose temper and dignity had suffered from the vicissitudes of the past twenty-four hours, turned on him like a flash. "Allah be merciful!" he cried angrily. "Will that child never cease? How can I think—much less plan with your caterwauling going on, Nuri? Those may be my own cavalry—and again they may be men of the Beni Murra. My horse, like yours, Nuri, is too tired to stand another race. You may do as you

choose, as for me, I shall put my faith in the Holy Prophet, and wait for them here."

"That goes for me," assented Bill. "And I'm so tired I don't care an awful lot who they are."

Annad said nothing, but drew over beside his father and waited. Nuri hung his head, thoroughly subdued, and drew his horse near Bill.

Suddenly a body of perhaps fifty horsemen forged ahead and with cries of "Allah! Allah!" dashed toward the little group waiting quietly at the top of the rise. And as they spurred forward they spread out fanwise so as to prevent any escape on either side.

"Give me your rifle, Annad," commanded the sheik when the horsemen had come within a couple of hundred yards of them.

"But surely, father, it is suicide to shoot—" expostulated his son.

"Obey me—at once, Annad!"

Annad handed over the gun, but instead of firing at the oncoming troops, the sheik tore off a strip of his white undergarment and knotting an end to the rifle-barrel, lifted the improvised flag above his head.

For what seemed to Bill an age, but was in reality no more than a split second or two at most, the charging horsemen raced toward them. Then, at an unseen signal, their war cry of "Allah! Allah!" shot again across the dark sand. But this

time the first war cry was followed by a second. "Beni Khelb! Beni Khelb!" rang out like a tocsin in the night.

"Allah has been merciful," exclaimed Mohammed Ibn fervently, and rode forward to meet his tribesmen.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PLANE PLAYS ITS PART AGAIN

THE sun had just appeared above the desert's rim when a thoroughly worn out Billy dropped onto his couch in Mohammed Ibn's pavilion and immediately fell asleep.

Twelve hours later, the sheik awoke him. With Nuri and Annad he went down the Wady and there they splashed in the shallow stream for half an hour. Greatly refreshed, they returned to the camp, and sat down to a huge dinner of roast goat, breadflaps and coffee. Then Bill let out three holes in his belt and sank back on the couch again with all the satisfaction that comes of using semi-starvation as an appetizer to a plentiful meal.

Presently the tobacco jar was passed and when the sheik's bubble pipe was drawing, he and Billy went into a low-toned conference.

At last Mohammed Ibn stood up and yawned.

"Your plan," he said to Bill, "is a good one—we will follow it out. You and I and Nuri will start at daybreak in the plane. My troops under their own subchiefs will start at the same time. Although you've slept the day through, I advise turning in now—I shall do likewise—so soon as I have given

my leaders their orders. Good night, boy, we'll need all our strength tomorrow."

"Good night, sir," Bill answered sleepily. "Glad you approve. To tell the truth, I don't think I'll ever catch up on the sleep I've lost lately."

Then he lay back on his rugs again and five minutes later was deep in dreamless slumber.

An oil lamp was burning in the tent when the sheik awoke him, and by its flickering light Bill gradually located himself on the map of Arabia once more.

"You've enjoyed a long restful sleep," the sheik commented kindly.

Billy yawned. "Compared to me, Rip Van Winkle had insomnia."

"I've heard of him," the sheik laughed. "Turn out now, for as soon as we have had some breakfast, we must be under way."

An hour later, breakfast finished, and the plane carefully looked over, Billy was ready to start. It was daylight when Bill climbed aboard with Mohammed Ibn and Nuri as passengers. The entire population of the Black Tents stood at a respectful distance to watch their take-off. Dark robed women quieted frightened children as Bill started the roaring motor, and a number of grown-ups as well were seen to start and flinch at the terrible sound. Annad, puffed up with knowledge after his maiden hop, im-

pressed a group of sub-chiefs by explaining in detail just how everything was done.

A last wave of the hand in farewell, a last shout of Godspeed from the assembled Arabs and the big Fokker rose from a short taxi over hard, smooth sand into the clear morning air.

Billy knew that following their sheik's orders, nine-tenths of the Beni Khelb fighting men had ridden in from every part of Mohammed Ibn's wide lands during the past twelve hours. The night before he had noticed the myriad lights of their bivouac fires dotting the desert on every side, but this morning as he circled the great encampment in a wide descending arc, he began to realize the real extent of the sheik's forces. For several miles in every direction the desert was alive with men and horses and camels. For some minutes he was able to look down on that interesting scene—an army of Bedouin cavalry about to march. Then reluctantly he pointed the plane's nose toward the eastern horizon. The army below slipped away, and before them lay a panorama of rolling sand waves as far as the eye could see.

"I thought you said ten thousand men," he called over his shoulder to the sheik, "there seemed to me twice as many."

Mohammed Ibn smiled. "Every warrior of my great clan is worth two of any other," he declared proudly. "But ten thousand men is a large army for

the desert, and a novice will always give a large army credit for more men than are numbered within its ranks."

"How are you able to feed all those men on the march?" asked Nuri, whose propensity for asking questions seemed endless. "They must get rid of a tremendous amount of food."

The sheik winked at Bill. "They do, son," he said gravely, "but the moon is large."

"What's the moon got to do with it?" For once, Nuri was puzzled.

"It's made of green cheese, you know—every time a warrior gets hungry on the march, he shoots off a piece—and there you are," explained the sheik.

Nuri knew he had been "taken for a ride," but this time no fitting retort came into his mind.

Billy laughed at the small Arab's expression of disgust. "I guess that'll hold you for a while, Nuri."

But that young man expressed his indignation—"If you two gentlemen don't care to answer another gentleman's questions, *that* gentleman—"

"Enough!—enough!" groaned Mohammed Ibn. "I will tease you no more, my son. We are three good comrades bound on a great adventure. By your continual questions, boy—but no matter—we feed our men by camel transport, Nuri. And in a case like this where they are to ride across our own country, (What Beel would call 'something over

a hundred miles'—and we of Arabia call 'four water holes'.—then herds of sheep and goats are previously driven there to those waterholes, and you have a commissariat on the hoof, as it were. Each man in my army is equipped also with a forty-five pound bag of flour—six weeks' rations. We are, you see, fully victualed for a long campaign if necessary. And now, let us be quiet, Nuri. To me this flying through the air is a wonderful and a new experience. I wish to watch and look and think."

For some time they droned along at an altitude of about a thousand feet. The rolling ocean of sand below continued on and out to a cloudless skyline, unchanging and monotonous.

They had passed the third of the desert waterholes and Bill thought he could make out the dim silhouettes of high hills or mountains straight ahead, when the motor began to skip.

Mohammed Ibn sighed. "It is wonderful—this speed, Beel," he seemed profoundly moved. "To think that we fly over the land in an hour and a half—it will take my men a day and a half to cross —wonderful!"

"Wonderful—if you get there," growled Bill.

The sheik looked up. "What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Hear that motor, sheik?"

"I hear the roar—"

"Yes—but do you notice any difference in what you call the roar?"

"I think I do. In the engine's roar, there is a pounding—it is like—what shall I say?—the regular sound of a horse trotting?"

"That's right, sir—and now?"

"Ah, yes. . . . now it sounds. . . . as though the horse had hurt one leg and was trying to run on the other three!"

Bill let out a whoop. "For a man who has been up only once before—and has hardly ever seen a motor, you certainly are the goods, sheik!"

"How so, Beel?"

"Why, you have explained exactly what the matter is—only instead of legs, it's cylinders—and instead of running on all cylinders, one or more are missing fire."

"And why are they missing fire, Beel?" asked Nuri, breaking into the discussion.

"Carbon on spark-plugs, dirty gasoline—oh, a number of reasons."

"What is carbon on—"

"Allah be merciful!" shot out Mohammed Ibn. "The lad is a fountain of questions—were it but knowledge he spouted the Prophet Himself would be a secondary teacher. Be quiet, Nuri. Tell me, Beel—shall we have to go down?"

Bill waited a moment before speaking. "I think she'll run a while longer," he said slowly. "I cer-

tainly hope so. Those mountains we see in the distance must be the stronghold where Dr. Parker is besieged. We've no way of knowing how far out in the desert the Beni Murra send their patrols. I can't make out any horsemen at this distance, can you?"

Mohammed Ibn carefully scanned the landscape. "The desert is as empty as a camel's stomach after a ride between water holes," he announced. "I have never visited these mountains before, though I've seen them from a distance. For some forgotten reason our people hold them accursed."

The motor, for all its skipping was bringing them nearer to the mountains every minute and soon they could see spreading before them three magnificent ridges of red and white sandstone. About thirty miles to the south lay the wide dry bed of some long, dead lake or sea; beyond in purplish grey haze, the Great Arabian Desert. And behind the sandstone ridges in sharp outline against the sky towered the peaks of the mountain range.

All at once the motor gave a last gasping phutt —and stopped.

"Sorry, sheik," called Billy, shoving his stick slightly forward so as to depress the Fokker's nose to a proper gliding angle, "here is where we have to go down, whether we like it or not."

Mohammed Ibn lowered his field glasses.

"I see no sign of enemy troops," he rejoined

cheerfully, "If you can rectify the trouble, it will tend only to delay our journey a short while—and we have plenty of time."

Billy was gazing ahead watching for a smooth place to land. "I think I can fix her—that is, if the Beni Murra don't pop out at us from behind those ridges. Here's hoping their lookouts haven't spotted us!"

Swooping gracefully downward Billy brought the big plane to earth on a hard level stretch of sand.

"Bring those glasses with you, Nuri," he ordered, as he unlocked the cabin door and stepped out. "And climb up on the wing section and keep your eyes on those ridges. Here—I'll give you a boost. Remember—" he added when the spry, young Arab had scrambled up to his point of vantage, "at the first sight of anyone on the skyline, let us know immediately."

Mohammed Ibn stood beside him looking thoughtfully at the motor. "If there is anything I can do—?" he began.

"Well, sheik, if you don't mind—you could help me. Go into the cabin and in the first locker to the left you'll find a box of spark-plugs—the only box there, in fact. If you'll bring it to me I'll get busy and use them."

When he got out of the plane Billy had brought a short ladder with him. This he propped against

the side of the engine, climbed up and got to work.

The sheik reappeared with the spark-plugs. "Do you need these yet?"

"In a few minutes, sheik. I've got to get rid of these plugs up here first. The quickest way to fix this is to put in a lot of new ones. Of course, if I had more time. . . ."

"Horsemen on the ridge!" sang out Nuri. "They've seen us—or I'm a dead camel!"

"You'll be one soon, if I don't get some time on this job," Bill shot back. "Hand me the box, please, sheik, and then climb up there with Nuri. See where they are and how long you think it will take them to get over here."

The sheik made haste to do as he was asked and presently perched beside Nuri, who passed over the glasses. As soon as he trained his binoculars on the approaching Bedouins, he began to speak.

"There are at least three hundred of them, Beel," he called down, "and what is worse, they are riding straight for us. They are Beni Murra all right—and I think—yes, I am sure—there is a farengi officer with them."

Billy was working frantically. "Not so good!" he muttered, feeling that his fingers were all thumbs. Then he called back to the sheik, "How much time have I got, sheik?"

"Not over quarter of an hour, son. Do you think you can make it?"

"I doubt it, chief. But I'll do my best. How about Nuri's fetching a couple of rifles out of the cabin?"

"A brave idea, Beel. Two men can't stop three hundred in the open, but we'll promise to empty a few saddles before they finish us. As it is—" the sheik lifted his hands to heaven, "we are in the hands of Allah the Most Merciful."

"It seems to me," sniffed Nuri, "that Allah has had his hands full with the three of us lately. Me—I'm going to pray to Beel's God. Between the two we may get out of this with our lives."

Mohammed Ibn, engrossed in studying the oncoming horsemen ignored this heretic outburst entirely.

Bill laughed. He was working at top speed on a job he knew would take him at least half an hour—no hope of finishing in time. That fact he was keeping to himself. Desperate as he was, he could not help being amazed at Nuri's religious diplomacy.

"Whatever you do, Nuri, make it snappy," he called. "And while you're about it, bring three rifles. When those chaps get near enough I'll take a hand myself. Your brother Beel isn't keen on being potted like a tame goat tied to a stake!"

"Then you don't think there's a chance of getting away?" Nuri dropped to the ground before Bill and peered up into his face.

"Your God and mine are one and the same, Nuri," Bill spoke rather gravely. "As Mohammed Ibn reminded us, we are in His hands. Get those guns, old sport, and let me do the worrying."

He turned back to his work and Nuri ran into the cabin.

CHAPTER XIX

INTO THE MOUNTAINS

BILL, working against time to rectify his engine trouble, did not stop when the perspiration ran in rivulets down his forehead and into his eyes. The day was very hot and the sand, baked through and through had set the air above it quivering like a jarred string. He looked up for a second, shot a glance at the horde of Bedouins bearing down upon the plane. As a background to the galloping horsemen the sandstone terrace over which they had come flushed rosecolor in the dazzling sunlight, a striking contrast to the hazy purple of the peaks beyond. Overhead the sky was a luminous turquoise.

Nuri reappeared, lugging three rifles, and the sheik called to Bill again.

"How are you getting along?"

"Pretty well, sheik. How much time is there left?"

"Ten minutes at most. Those men are within easy firing distance now—I can't understand why they don't shoot. Think you will finish in time?"

"Hardly—I'm about half through—"

"Perhaps the Beni Murra intend to make prisoners of us," suggested Nuri.

"I doubt it," returned Mohammed Ibn. "They are sure we can't get away, and are holding their fire until they are absolutely certain of their targets."

For a few minutes he remained silent, studying the Arab horsemen through his glasses. Nuri had made three trips with the rifles to the top of the wing section and was now perched up there beside the sheik.

Presently Mohammed Ibn gave a sharp cry. "They've stopped! The whole troop seems confused—they are pointing in this direction!"

"Look behind us!" shouted Nuri excitedly. "Troops—farengi troops! Thousands of them!"

Billy stared back over the desert. To his utter amazement he saw a vast army approaching; and not more than five or six miles away at most. Infantry they were, in khaki shirts and shorts, mounted officers leading them. Rank upon rank of glistening bayonets and rifle barrels flashed in the sun. He could even make out the unfurled standards of the colorbearers—British colors—there was no doubt about it, a large British infantry unit was marching toward them.

Bill was puzzled. What were British troops doing in this unexplored part of Arabia? There were British armies in Palestine and Syria, he knew. But

in this southern land far below Hejaz—he couldn't believe his eyes.

The sheik was shouting like a madman. "Look at those fools of the Beni Murra!" he yelled. "They are in full retreat. Hurry, Beel, hurry—you may have time yet!"

"But the British troops back there—" began Bill.

"There are no troops there, Beel. It is a mirage. What you see is a reflection of British forces marching hundreds of miles away to the north—that is all."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Billy. "Do you mean to tell me those troops aren't really there?" He was working with feverish haste at the motor now. "That the whole business is nothing more than an optical illusion?"

"Exactly that, my son, and common enough in the desert."

"What causes it?"

"A scientist once told me the illusion is due to excessive bending of light-rays in traversing adjacent layers of air of widely different densities."

"Whatever that means!" remarked Nuri, facetious as ever. "The great thing is that you are getting time to finish your work on the plane. But I am really disappointed—"

Mohammed Ibn quelled him with a look. "We know there are no British here, but the Beni Murra

saw our plane and evidently took us for a scouting party of that mirrored army. They will realize their mistake soon enough. See! the mirage is beginning to fade already!"

"And the horsemen have turned back," sang out Nuri. "They're coming on the run!"

Bill took a flying leap off his ladder.

"Let them come!" he cheered. "I've got the motor fixed at last. Jump down quickly—we'll beat the Beni Murra to it yet."

The Beni Murra had indeed turned, and this time they kept firing steadily at the three by the airplane, as they swept onward.

Bill and his Arab friends wasted no time in senseless retaliation. Their job was to get the Fokker into the air as soon as possible and thereby escape being taken prisoners. While Bill started the motor, Mohammed Ibn and Nuri flung the rifles and ladder into the cabin and slammed the door upon their enemies, but a few hundred yards away.

The Beni Murra had ceased firing. Evidently the French officer leading them wished to take these airmen alive.

But he was forced to change his mind, for the big airbus was moving now and Bill taxied her forward into a storm of bullets which rang against the steel of her fuselage like hail on a tin bucket. Bill set his teeth. He could not afford to lose the

plane—everything depended on their getting away safely.

"Hold fast!" he shouted to his companions, then drove the Fokker straight at his enemies.

Came a bump—a jar—another bump and the roaring monster sped through the mob and swiftly over the hard, smooth sand, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Then as the plane rose into the air, Bill banked sharply to get a view of his late assailants. The three in the plane caught a fleeting glimpse of the battle-scarred course they had run, while those Beni Murra warriors who had not been in the path of the plane raced away from the scene of disaster in every direction.

Nuri was wild with delight. "They're afraid we'll charge them again. Did you see them tumble when the plane hit them? Oh, Beel, can't you do it again—to please Nuri?"

Bill shook his head and directed their course toward the mountains.

"Sorry," he replied, "but it's out of the question. I don't like to kill men that way—but it was a case of kill or be killed. You forget, young man, that we have business over yonder. We've been long enough getting to Dr. Parker, as it is."

It was perfect flying weather. The motor was acting beautifully now, and the big airplane sped along, her whirling propeller slicing off the miles in rapid succession. A glance behind showed her

pilot that the mirage had entirely faded, and he wondered idly if by any chance those British soldiers tramping across Northern Arabia would ever know how they had saved the lives of three persons in the Great Desert over a thousand miles away.

They were over the sandstone ridges now, and as Bill expected, he saw that they acted as a barrier between the desert and a deep valley about three miles wide that narrowed to a mere defile through the mountain wall. This gorge or sik as his Arab friends called it, he afterward learned was only twelve feet wide. As far as one could see on either side the mountain wall rose hundreds of feet above the valley and the plain of the desert beyond.

This valley had become an enormous Bedouin camp. As the plane glided high above it, its passengers saw thousands of men and horses and tents spread over its entire area.

"I thought we would find the Beni Murra here," declared Mohammed Ibn, "That sik, so I've been told, is the only way in. Their problem, of course, is to penetrate that massive range of sandstone over there. No wonder Dr. Parker and his men were able to hold an army at bay. All the French and Beni Murra can do is to sit down and starve them out."

They circled the valley twice, and although they could hear no shots, the white puffs of smoke from

the Bedouin rifles told them that their enemies were vainly striving to bring them to earth.

"Those chaps don't have much luck with their shooting," chuckled Nuri, "but they've got a stone rampart between them and the desert. Our men, when they come up, are going to have a heap of trouble dislodging them from a stronghold like that."

Bill glanced quickly over his shoulder and winked at Mohammed Ibn. "What some small boys don't know won't hurt them!"

"You two have something up your sleeves, then?" came Nuri's eager query. "Oh, please tell me, Beel!"

But Bill was busily engaged in spiraling for altitude to navigate the massive range beyond the little valley.

"Don't bother Beel," the sheik warned, "he has plenty to do at present." To keep you quiet, I'll tell you this: Beel and I have a plan. If it works out, that sandstone rampart, as you call it, will turn the tide of battle. Without the ledges our whole scheme would be as nothing. You can busy yourself now, figuring out our plan. But keep your thoughts within your head for the present."

The plane had now reached an altitude of about four thousand feet. Bill leveled off and a few minutes later they had crossed the outer barrier of the mountain range and found themselves flying

over a narrow valley, spurs of which led up into passes between the peaks. The place was fully five hundred feet higher than the valley wherein the French and Beni Murra were encamped. With the exception of the defile which led down to that valley, it was completely shut off from the outside world by the high rocky walls they had just flown over.

"There's our lake, sheik," shouted Bill, pointing to a large body of water which sparkled in the sunlight a mile or so ahead. "The man who told you he had been here didn't lie after all."

"What man?" demanded Nuri.

"And there are Dr. Parker's tents—or I'm much mistaken," cried Mohammed Ibn, completely ignoring the youngster. "Beel, my boy, Allah has given us a lucky day. With his help all will be well —and I'll be able to strike a blow at the Beni Murra that will last for generations."

Bill was lowering the Fokker's altitude now in a series of short spirals, peering below for a safe place to land. As they flew lower men could be seen running from tents in the encampment near the lake, and gazing upward.

"Well, here goes!" Bill flung back, "It's liable to be bumpy—so hang on."

Down swooped the big plane. For an instant it seemed to hover over the earth like some huge bird before alighting. There came a jar that sent Nuri

sprawling on the cabin floor. Unlike the sheik, he had disregarded Bill's advice. Now he regretted it. But before he could get a grip on something substantial, he was sent flying to the other side against a locker with a force that almost jarred his teeth loose.

"Stop her, Beel!" he shrieked, "for the Love of Allah, stop her!"

But the plane had stopped of its own accord and Nuri got painfully to his feet.

"Perhaps the next time you will do as you are told, young man," the sheik admonished. "The blessed Koran says—"

But Billy, who had stepped out of the pilot's seat, intervened.

"Have a heart, sheik!" he pleaded, throwing his arm over Nuri's shoulder. "I couldn't help those bumps, old sport. The ground was terribly rough. Are you badly hurt?"

Nuri looked up with a rueful grin. "Not so badly, Beel. My knee feels as though seventeen camels had kicked it, and my jaw—well, I'll never be the same man again. . . ." he broke off and pointed toward the group of men who were gathering about the plane.

"Look, Beel, at the farengi sheik with the short pants and tall sun hat," he cried delightedly, "Honest, Beel, do you think that old crane can be the man we have come so far to find?"

Bill looked around and saw a tall middleaged man approaching them. He wore the shorts, khaki shirt and sunhelment of the tropics. On his beak-like nose princenez were set and his long legs covered the ground in jerky strides much like the bird Nuri had named.

"I dare say you're right," Bill assented with a grin. "It's probably Dr. Parker. And now that you seem well enough to take an interest in things again, what do you say we all get out and meet him?"

CHAPTER XX

THE OLD MAN OF THE MOUNTAIN

Billy, Mohammed Ibn and Nuri stepped out of the plane into a half circle of white men and Arabs who stared at them and at the Fokker with unconcealed surprise and interest. Singling out the tall person in the sunhelmet, Bill walked over to him.

"Dr. Parker, is it not?" he asked, speaking in English.

"That's my name, young sir, but who are you? How you happened to shoot down on us like a bolt from the blue is beyond my comprehension—unless," he added, "you've come in answer to the message I sent out by Zeid, weeks ago. If so, I don't mind saying we'd given up all hope of holding the wells. Now that you are here, we are in no better position. What we need, young man, is an army—nothing but an army, and a good-sized one at that. If—"

At this point Bill decided to break in on the long winded old gentleman. He produced the letter Mr. Smith had given him in Mecca and handed it to Dr. Parker.

"This letter, sir," he suggested, "will explain, I think."

"Quite so— quite so," returned the explorer, fingering the envelope in a dazed manner. Now that Bill had interrupted his train of thought, he seemed to have difficulty in bringing his mind back to the matter in hand.

"Perhaps, if you read it, sir," prompted Bill impatiently.

"Quite so— quite so," said Dr. Parker for the second time, but he slit the flap with a forefinger and did as he was asked.

"What does he say?" asked the sheik eagerly.

Bill turned to Mohammed Ibn and winked. "He's a bit flabbergasted by our sudden appearance, sheik. When he's through with Dad's letter, I'll introduce you."

Twice Dr. Parker read the letter. He took his time about it, too, punctuating his reading with little ejaculations of pleasure or amazement.

"Well, well!" he beamed at last, "so this is my friend Smith's son!"

"Yes, sir," replied Bill, shaking Dr. Parker's rather limp hand.

"Of course I'm glad to see you. Too bad your father is laid up in Mecca. He says he had hoped to enlist the aid of some of the Bedouin tribes in our behalf. Too bad—too bad—I doubt if he could do it. Perhaps you noticed the army in the valley

below as you flew over— ten thousand of them, at least?"

"Twelve thousand Beni Murra and several hundred French," said Bill, in an effort to stem the tide of garrulity.

"Just so— just so, Mr. Smith. Even if the relief expedition comes from the north before we're starved out, they will be gobbled up by that army in a minute— in a minute, sir. The French want those oil wells, and it looks as if they are going to get them. Now, if instead of an airplane you had brought me an army—"

Bill was becoming exasperated. "Do you speak Arabic, Doctor?" he cut in.

"I certainly do," replied the scientist in that tongue.

"Then shake hands with Mohammed Ibn, sheik of the Beni Khelb, Doctor," Bill easily slid back into the language they all understood. "And this is his son by adoption, Nuri. The sheik will tell you that ten thousand of his men are on their way across the desert at this very moment. They will arrive within easy distance to start an offensive before daylight tomorrow. The sheik happens, by the way, to be the owner of all this territory and wants to make a dicker with you for the oil wells."

Dr. Parker gaped at them, open-mouthed.

"You don't say!" he began, then abruptly he wrung Mohammed Ibn's hand and gave Nuri a

pat on the head. "Marvelous— marvelous! Come right up to my tent, gentlemen, and we'll have a chat. Oh, yes, I'll buy your oil rights, sheik—that is, of course, if you can get rid of those other fellows down there for me. Come along now, you must be hungry, all of you. We can't offer much, but—" he grasped Mohammed Ibn's arm, and led toward the tents of the party, grouped on the higher ground at the side of the valley.

"I'll be with you when I've secured the plane," Bill shouted after him, motioning Nuri to stay.

"Tell me something, Beel!" Nuri lowered his voice to a perplexed whisper. "That funny old man is weak in the head, isn't he?"

Bill laughed. "Nothing like that, Nuri. He's a scientist—that's all."

"A scientist?"

"Yes."

"And what is a scientist?"

Bill was stumped for a moment. "Well," he replied thoughtfully, "Dr. Parker has read and studied until he is able to find oil where nobody else had any idea oil lay. That oil, by the way, will be worth millions of camels to Mohammed Ibn and many people in my country."

"Huh!" snorted Nuri with great contempt. "Then I shall never be a scientist when I grow big. No—not for a million camels. In Mecca we put such people under lock and key. We—"

"Say, Nuri, I'm hungry," interrupted Bill, laughing, "and the Doctor promised eats. Jump into the cabin and put things to rights while I look over the motor."

"If you and the sheik don't boss this job, Beel, we'll never beat the Beni Murra. That old woman in pants up there will ruin everything!"

"Perhaps," returned Bill, "but not if I can help it. Get busy now—dinner's waiting."

Ten minutes later, their work finished, Bill and Nuri made their way over to the tent. Here they found the doctor and Mohammed Ibn seated on some rugs, chatting pleasantly.

"Everything is arranged, Beel," greeted the sheik. "I've sold my rights to the oil land up the valley and after we get rid of the Beni Murra, Dr. Parker and I will sign papers to that effect."

The scientist's body servant announced lunch, and the four trooped over to the mess tent. Here Dr. Parker seemed to realize the conventions and introduced them to other members of his expedition.

"We keep two men with a Browning machine gun, posted day and night behind a barrier near the lower end of the gulch," said Dr. Parker in answer to a question from Bill, after they were seated at the table. "Another man keeps watch on the rocks above. In that way we always know what those people in the valley are doing. They have tried to

get through three times, but the machine gun fire has been quite effective in stopping them. On the other hand, they have us bottled up completely in here. There is no other entrance to this place except by airplane."

Bill nodded. "So the sheik says. Has he told you anything of our plan?"

"Yes, he gave me an outline. Personally, I hardly think it feasible. You will pardon my asking, but have you sufficient engineering experience to carry it out?"

"I think so, sir. You see, I am a midshipman in the United States Navy assigned at present to special secret service duty abroad."

The Doctor's manner changed at once. "An officer in our Navy!" he exclaimed. "Oh, that is quite different! Please accept my apologies, Mr. Smith!"

Bill said something polite, and the conversation became general again. He felt enormously relieved. Of course, all was not plain sailing yet, but at least the interference he had feared from the old gentleman was now a thing of the past.

After the meal, the whole party walked up the valley to the place where the oil had been discovered. Dr. Parker led the way toward the mountainside on the left, and in a deep, sandy hollow they came upon a considerable pool of black, viscous liquid.

"Not very impressive," remarked Dr. Parker,

"but it is oil, just the same— and very good oil, too. This is an outcropping of an oil river which flows under this range. Later on when we are equipped to start drilling, you will see oilrigs all over this valley."

He went on to give them a lengthy and highly technical lecture on his find, of which Bill understood about a tenth and Mohammed Ibn and Nuri even less. Thoroughly bored, they were all glad when he suggested they cross the valley and take a nearer view of the lake. This they found to be a good-sized body of water lying between high rocky banks.

"This valley shows unmistakable signs of an ancient civilization," announced the scientist. "These banks, below the rubble, are hand-hewn blocks of sandstone. The lake is artificial. A gigantic undertaking it must have been."

"I can see no outlet," commented Mohammed Ibn.

"There is none on the surface. It is subterranean, without doubt," affirmed Dr. Parker.

"Dr. Parker, may I set some of your men to work, under the sheik's direction? asked Bill. "We'd like to get started now, if we are to pull off the stunt before daylight tomorrow."

"Whenever you say," the Doctor was all cordiality. "I fancy we have all the tools you will need.

If you'll excuse me, I'll round up the men and send them over."

Billy waited until he saw the men had got fairly well started with the work he had planned. Then after a short conference with Mohammed Ibn, Nuri and he went back to the plane.

While Bill was getting the big motor warmed up, the young Arab got a gang of Dr. Parker's men busy removing boulders and hastily leveling the path for the airplane's take-off.

Half an hour later Nuri slammed the cabin door behind him, Bill waved a hand to the men grouped at either side and the Fokker rolled forward along the track just cleared.

Then she took the air and Nuri, looking down, saw his fosterfather and the work-gang by the lake looking upward and waving. When they had disappeared from view he turned his eyes forward and his heart certainly skipped a beat. Straight ahead only a few hundred yards away, at most, the almost perpendicular mountainside that shut in the end of the valley towered above them.

"Beel!" he shrieked, "you can never get over it!"

"Don't have to," the pilot gritted his teeth, his eyes on the wall—"Hold fast! and WATCH!"

Nuri saw Bill pull his control stick back slightly, nosing them upward. At the same time their port wing dropped suddenly until it pointed directly

earthward. The plane was flying on its side, with Nuri hanging to his seat for dear life. Then they dove, with the mountainside but a few feet away. Nuri was sure they would crash— but found that the Fokker was flying back down the valley the way they had come. They were close to the ground, but Nuri saw that the plane was pointed slightly upward on an easy angle that would clear the rocky barrier between this mountain valley and the outside world.

"And that," said Bill with a swift glance into the cabin, "is what we call a wing-over. It's a manoeuver used principally in combat flying, but it comes in mighty handy once in a while. Hope I didn't scare you too much. This plane is a cruiser and too heavy for stunt work, but sometimes such things are necessary. If they had installed belts in the old bus, you wouldn't have got a single jolt."

"In the meantime," Nuri said ruefully while he rubbed a bruised elbow, "I had better grow a tail like an ape. Hands and legs aren't enough to hang on with, Beel, once you get started!"

Billy chuckled. "Use your teeth, next time," he grinned. "And now you'd better get a nap. There'll be no sleep for us tonight."

Over the outer barrier they flew and high above the bowl-like valley, where the French and Beni Murra waited impatiently for Dr. Parker and his men to starve to death. Then came the limestone

ridges and they were over the desert once more. And while a tired little Arab boy slept in the cabin, mile upon mile of long, rolling hills slid away beneath them.

Half an hour's run brought them to one of the oases they had passed on their flight toward the mountains. Bill nosed the plane down with a sigh of contentment, for he saw Mohammed Ibn's army of Beni Khelb horsemen were spread out over the desert nearby.

As soon as Bill landed the plane it was surrounded by warriors friendly enough, but filled with natural curiosity. He opened the door and found an excited Annad waiting outside.

"My father? He is safe?" the young sheik's first words were anxious, as he embraced his farengi friend.

"He couldn't be better, Annad. I wish I could say that about mine. Just the minute I get through with this oil business, back to your holy Mecca I go—and—but that isn't what I flew over here to tell you. We've found Dr. Parker. . . ." Bill launched into a short history of what had occurred and what they proposed to do. "Your father says," he ended, "you are to have your army spread out fanwise about a mile this side of the sandstone ridges—at least two hours before daybreak. Can you make it?"

"Easily, Beel!"

"Good. You are to keep as quiet as possible and there must be no attack until they come over the top. Your troops will then close in on the ridge as you advance,—understand?"

"It shall be done as you say, Beel."

"Be careful not to advance your men too fast at first. It's too dangerous."

"Yes, that is true. By the way, how is Nuri?"

"Tired out. The poor little chap is asleep in the cabin. I must go back now, Annad. See you later, old man!"

"Good luck, Beel!"

"Good luck!"

Two minutes later the plane was in the air again speeding back toward the mountains.

CHAPTER XXI

'TWIXT DEVILS AND DEEP SEA

THE Fokker's flight back to the mountain was uneventful. Nuri slept peacefully the whole way, and Bill confessed to himself that he actually missed the usual rapid-fire barrage of questions.

"Poor kid," he thought, "he's all in, at last!" After landing the plane, Bill left him in the cabin and the boy slumbered soundly until supper time.

Meanwhile, Billy repeated his conversation with Annad to the sheik, and went over to the lakeside with him to see how the men were progressing.

"It is slow work, drilling by hand," Mohammed Ibn explained. "But now that they understand what they are doing, these fellows are extremely anxious to succeed. They have been penned up in here for weeks, and naturally they want to get out."

"Think they'll be through in time?"

"I'm sure of it. They know the part Annad and my horsemen are to play. Don't worry, everything will be ready a couple of hours before daylight."

From the lake, they sought out Dr. Parker and told him of Bill's success in locating the Beni Khelb and his arrangements with Annad at the

oasis. They found the scientist busily superintending the removal of tents and baggage to higher ground at the farther end of the valley.

The Doctor beamed with satisfaction on hearing Bill's good news.

"Splendid— splendid!" he exclaimed. "And now, I wonder if you two would mind supervising the building of the new camp? The men seem to be getting on pretty well—but they do need someone to keep an eye on them."

About sundown, a halt was called, and everybody trooped to supper. Nuri appeared, rubbing the sleep from his eyes and pretending to be angry because they had not aroused him.

After the meal and a few minutes' rest, they all went back to work again and kept hard at it until about midnight. Everything had been moved, the new camp was completed, and Mohammed Ibn reported the drilling by the lake entirely finished.

"And now," Dr. Parker suggested, "I think for the next two hours, we'd all better try to get a good rest. Your plan," he nodded to Bill, "seems to me most satisfactory—most satisfactory—" he repeated briskly, and turning, led the way to camp.

Bill nudged Nuri. "Yeah!" he murmured, "—so far, so good—but the worst is yet to come!"

The boys entered their tent and each sought his couch. In spite of his long rest, Nuri was still

sleepy, and not even his curiosity kept him awake. But try as he might, Bill could not compose himself. The excitement and anxiety with which he awaited the coming ordeal proved too much for him, and kicking off his covers, he went down to the plane. There he pottered about, looking it over until he was perfectly sure everything was as he wished it to be.

While he gave the plane a thorough going-over his mind centered on the future. "Thank the Lord this job's nearly over," he said to himself, "and just as soon as we down the Beni Murra—I'm going to beat it back to Mecca and find Dad. Mohammed Ibn has promised to go with me. He has influence with the Grand Shereef. If Dad has been captured, he will do his best to have him set free."

Although his thoughts were comforting, they did not altogether rid Bill of his worry. He knew he could never rest until he was sure his father was safe. But for the moment, there was nothing he coul do—but wait. . . . He was heartily glad when he saw the camp astir. Walking up from the plane, he met Dr. Parker with the sheik and Nuri, and together they tramped over to the lake.

"Everything is ready," Dr. Parker proclaimed. "It has taken the last stick of dynamite we carried, but I certainly don't begrudge it if your plan works —and I am very hopeful that it will, Mr. Smith."

"I'm sure we've tamped in enough of the explosive," Bill said decisively. "How about the wire up to the new camp?"

"My men report it in perfect order."

"The men with the Browning have been recalled from the gulch?"

"Yes, everybody except ourselves is up at the camp, and that is well above the lake's level."

"How about the signal? You're sure your second in command knows exactly what to do—and when to do it?"

"He has his instructions, Mr. Smith. I am convinced they will be carried out to the letter."

Bill glanced at his wristwatch. "We've got twenty minutes," he declared. "It's time we four got aboard the plane. Come along! We want everything to go on the dot tonight."

Once they were in the air, Bill worked the Fokker up to some three thousand feet above the mountain valley. At this height he flew in a series of small circles so that the plane remained above the lake and the camp. It was a brilliant starlight night, and a young moon hung low in the sky. Objects below stood out sharply in the clear, dry air, and they could easily see the little group of men at the camp staring upward. Beyond the rocky barrier lay the tents of the sleeping Beni Murra. And in the desert beyond the sandstone ridge a dark blur spreading fanshaped across the sand

was evidence that Annad had brought the Beni Khelb safely into position.

Bill looked at his watch again.

"Get ready," he called, and Mohammed Ibn opened a cabin window.

"Get set."

The sheik, holding a Very pistol, thrust his arm through the opening.

"Fire!"

A starshaped light dropped earthward and Bill, jerking back his stick sent the big Fokker hurtling up and out toward the desert.

There followed a terrific explosion. An enormous flame-tipped wave shot upward from the brink of the lake and the mountain valley sprang into bright illumination. For a moment or so the force of concussion sent the big plane bouncing like a cork in a rapid, and the passengers took alarm. But Bill had too many flying hours to his credit to allow the airbus to get out of hand. The bumps disappeared and he swung her into a sharp flipper turn. They had just time to see the lake vomit forth a great wave of water which swept through the breach in the wall and down the sharp incline toward the gulch, when all went black below them.

Bill immediately straightened out and sent the plane sailing over the mountain barrier. As they flew he decreased their altitude. Down in the valley, men awakened at the sound of explosion,

rushed out of their tents. Without further warning, a great wall of water avalanched from the narrow gorge and swept upon them. Before the half-dazed troops could realize their danger, they were swirled from their feet, and in an inconceivably short time the bowl-shaped valley had become a maelstrom of drowning men and horses.

The terrible whirl-pool rose higher and higher until the valley could hold no more and water flowed over the sandstone ridges to be sucked up by the sands of the desert.

Billy felt sick and turned his eyes away. "Poor devils," he muttered, "they're drowning like trapped rats in a bucket."

"Yes, praise be to Allah—one in a thousand of Bedawi can swim," the sheik commented callously. "See, Beel, a few have been washed onto that ridge and I see some hanging to their swimming horses—and those will be taken prisoners by my men."

But Nuri was disappointed. "Then there won't be any battle after all," he grumbled.

"Hear the big fighting man!" teased Bill. "I guess you expected Mohammed Ibn would let you take a hand in the scrimmage?"

"Yes, I did think so, Beel."

"Little boys will do well to keep out of battles. They are much better off, flying around in a nice

safe airplane," remarked the sheik, with a wink at Bill. "Might get hurt, you know."

"If my lords will remember," retorted the young Arab with mock seriousness, glancing from Bill to the sheik, "a certain unworthy Nuri managed to pull them both out of a scrimmage and saved them from getting very badly hurt!"

"Touchdown!" yelled Bill, while Mohammed Ibn applauded.

"What's touchdown, Beel?"

Bill snorted. "True to form, aren't you, Nuri? —Some day I'll take you to America—you can learn to play football there. A good football game makes a desert battle look like a love-feast!"

"But the touchdown, Beel—" Nuri was nothing if not persistent.

"Oh, that's the end of a perfect football game, Nuri."

"I think it's time we went down," announced the sheik. "Most of the water is out of the lake now, and things seem to be quieting, below."

Then Nuri's curiosity took another tack—and again got the better of him.

"How are you going to send your oil across the desert, now we have killed off your enemies and ours?" he inquired of Dr. Parker.

The old man, not being familiar with Nuri's inquisitiveness, looked surprised at this sudden interest in his affairs. "We shall build a pipe line and

pump it across the desert," he replied good-humoredly. "From there it shall be transported by steamer over the ocean to many different countries. Does that answer your question, young man?"

"Well, partly, doctor," Nuri looked perplexed. "But that valley is full of water and the sik has become a large river. . . ."

"The breach in the lake's retaining wall can be easily mended," Dr. Parker explained. "As for the valley—evaporation in this desert heat will soon dry it up."

Suddenly Bill gave an exclamation—"Look!" he cried, and all eagerly gazed forward. "There's a plane—coming our way. . . . Looks like a Navy-Wright NW-1 . . . they've seen that we're going to land—her pilot is sending her down too. What in the wide Arabian desert is a United States Navy plane doing out here?"

Bill expected no answer nor did he get one. The others were as astounded at the sight as he was.

The east was now ablaze with the rising sun, the desert a broadening band of blue and rose and gold as the two big airbuses touched the sand and came to a stop within a few yards of each other. The Fokker disgorged its passengers and pilot amid an exultant throng of Bedouins, led by Annad. Out of the Navy plane sprang a trim young lieutenant. Bill ran forward and the officer turned

and gave his hand to a gentleman who leaned heavily on a cane and was also assisted by a tall, bearded Arab.

"Dad!" cried Bill, "Ahmed the Swordmaker!" Nuri came up behind him and the two boys threw themselves upon their respective fathers and hugged them in wild delight.

"Where on earth have you come from?" asked Bill of his father, when the first excitement of meeting was over and they had shaken hands all round.

"Jedda—via Mohammed Ibn's black tents. . . ." smiled Mr. Smith.

"But I imagined you prisoners—" began Bill.

"We were prisoners," cut in his father. "It's a long story—I'll tell you about it later. Enough for the present that when I was brought before the Grand Shereef, I told him the whole truth about this venture and persuaded the wily old gentleman to allow us to pipe any oil we might find through his kingdom—with the promise, of course, of a substantial rake-off per gallon! He sent us to Jedda, where I radioed one of our cruisers which happened to be lying off Port Sudan. She steamed across the Red Sea and when her skipper heard our story, he ordered Lieutenant Winter to fly us out here to see what had become of you two boys."

He turned to Mohammed Ibn. "I must say, sheik," he declared, "I was very much surprised

when we landed at your encampment on the Wady Dauasir to learn that you had brought your army to these young fellows' aid."

"But they saved my son's life—" explained the head of the Beni Khelb, and he went on to give the newcomers a short history of what had happened since Bill and Nuri left Mecca.

"Splendid work!" declared Mr. Smith when the Arab chief had finished. He laid a hand on his stalwart son's shoulder. "Bill," he went on, "I am proud of the courage and ability both you and Nuri have shown. I was right to put my faith in you."

"Your son, Mr. Smith," announced Dr. Parker, "should certainly have a medal from our government. It was all his plan."

"Perhaps," smiled Mr. Smith, "but I think I can promise him something better."

Bill was all interest. "What's that, Dad?" he inquired.

"One month's leave!"

"Great stuff!" exulted his son.

"What shall you do with the furlough?" questioned his father.

Bill gazed over the desert thoughtfully.

"Oh, Beel, take me back to America and teach me that touchdown game!" suggested Nuri.

Bill shook his head. "Not yet, Nuri. I guess I'll see Arabia first. You and Annad and I will go back

to the black tents, with Mohammed Ibn's permission—and see if he can't cook up some excitement by way of a change. What do you say?"

"K-naught—I mean, K.O.," assented Nuri. "Things *are* getting a bit dull around here. Let's go!"

Those who enjoyed Billy's adventures in New Guinea and Arabia will be interested in the next book of this series: "Billy Smith—Mystery Ace, or Airplane Discoveries in the South American Hinterland."

THE END

BILLY SMITH—
MYSTERY ACE

THE GREAT ACE SERIES

By NOËL SAINSBURY, JR.

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BILLY SMITH—EXPLORING ACE
OR, BY AIRPLANE TO NEW GUINEA

BILLY SMITH—SECRET SERVICE ACE
OR, AIRPLANE ADVENTURES IN ARABIA

BILLY SMITH—MYSTERY ACE
OR, AIRPLANE DISCOVERIES IN SOUTH AMERICA

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BILLY SMITH—MYSTERY ACE

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BILLY SMITH MYSTERY ACE

CHAPTER I

FORCED DOWN

ABOARD the speeding airplane the roar of its 400 h.p. engine drowned all other sound. Then quite without warning the motor gave vent to a series of sharp, choking coughs. But these quickly subsided and the rhythmic uproar of a powerful exhaust gave place to ominous silence.

"Dead for keeps?" inquired Mr. Smith's voice through the receivers of Billy's phone set.

"I'm afraid so, Dad. The gas is clogging the jets. I'll bet those spicks at Pascasmayo didn't screen it."

"Means crash for us, eh?"

"Looks like it. The old bus is no helicopter."

From his place at the controls of their specially designed Loening Amphibian, Bill's eyes swept the unpromising view below. Not a possible landing place in sight. Nothing but razor-edged peaks

of the Peruvian Andes, swimming like islands in a waveless sea of mist and cloud which blotted out the valleys beneath.

Bill banked slightly and nosed into a gentle circular glide between the peaks. Then he looked up and stripped off his headgear, for his father was standing beside him. With a smile of encouragement, the explorer laid an affectionate hand on Billy's shoulder.

"Where do you figure we are, son?"

Billy frowned. "Can't tell exactly, Dad. Every map of this region is different. Since that cloud formation crept in below, you can't tell one valley from another. We're about half way between Carjamarca and Chachapoyas, I reckon—but that doesn't mean much."

"Doesn't the Upper Amazon, or rather, the Maranon River, flow north through one of these valleys?"

"It does—but in our position there's no telling which valley. The Maranon is our only chance, though. Most of the valleys run down to narrow rocky gullies—well, here goes!" he added grimly as the descending plane sank into the cloud bank.

"Good luck, Billy. You'll make it yet!"

Billy did not reply. Fog-blindness makes the

most courageous pilot nervous. It is most unpleasant to be able to see no farther than the nose of one's plane; to know that what one sees, one will hit. And in this position a stalled motor to add to the danger!

Since leaving the sleepy Peruvian seaport of Pascasmayo nearly two hours earlier, they had been traveling in a northeasterly direction toward the remote town of Moyobamba which lay on the other side of the mountains. Now they were dropping into one of the numberless valleys of the great South American mountain range, with death lurking in its unknown depths.

As they descended Billy continued to incline the gliding plane laterally, rotating it more and more about its longitudinal axis until the wings were almost perpendicular, a sideslip perilously near. But once Billy believed he was in the approximate center of the valley, away from its hidden slopes, he meant to stay there.

Nosing well over, his sharp bank sent them speeding earthward in a narrow corkscrew spiral, opaqueness swirling about them, the active needle of the altimeter the only visible sign that the amphibian was traveling at all. With straining eyes he vainly sought to pierce the mist. Would

the cloud break in time for him to level off—or did it penetrate to the valley's floor? In that case their spiral would nose them into certain death. Yet to level off in this fog would mean a crash against the valley walls.

Plan after plan shot through his mind—and was rejected. An error in judgment now would bring not only his own death, but his father's as well. What should he do? What *could* he do?

"The fog is thinning, Billy!" His father's voice was steady.

"By gosh—it is! And look! There's the river!" he shouted.

A moment later the big plane was headed down the narrow stream on an even keel a bare fifty feet above the water.

"Just pray we don't hit a rock, Dad," he added as he leveled off.

Then he allowed her tail to drop slightly, and their step splashed easily into the water. The amphibian was floating on the quiet bosom of the Maranon after a smart landing into the wind. The current carried them swiftly toward the suspension bridge and mountain village of Balsas, a couple of hundred yards distant.

"Gee!" Billy ejaculated. "That was a near

thing, Dad! I thought we were in for a pile-up, sure. Good old river, this!"

"We're even luckier than you think, Bill. There is white water behind us, and from here it looks as if there are more rapids just beyond the bridge. You've managed to land on the only smooth stretch of water for miles around, if other mountain rivers I've seen are anything to go by. Can you make the village dock?"

Billy shook his head. "Not a chance of it. Will you please go forward and sling over that small anchor? Otherwise, we'll knock a hole in her hull on those rocks ahead."

Mr. Smith hastened back into the cabin and out on the narrow deck that ran forward to the nose below the pilot's cockpit and the inverted motor. Over went the anchor to catch quickly on the river's rocky bottom and a moment or two later the big amphibian swung around, tugging on her anchorage.

"She'll hold," Bill told his father. "How about it? Shall I break out the dinghy?"

"Not worth while," Mr. Smith decided. "The whole town seems to be running down to the wharf. I dare say the natives have never seen a plane near to, before. Somebody will be rowing

out here before long or I'm much mistaken in human nature."

Mr. Smith's judgment was substantiated almost immediately. A rowboat with two men in it put off from the crowded dock and began to move in their direction, the men eyeing the plane and its occupants with unconcealed curiosity, as they approached.

"Good morning, gentlemen," the man in the stern greeted Billy and his father, in Spanish, as the boat drew alongside. "Welcome to Balsas."

"Good morning, senor," returned the Smiths, also in Spanish. "Won't you come aboard?"

"Thank you, with pleasure—" smiled the Peruvian, and did so.

"Permit me to introduce myself," the black-eyed little man continued. "I am Emilio Mesia, deputy for this district."

Mr. Smith performed the like office for his tall, redhaired son and himself. "You are, I believe, a brother of Don Pablo Mesia, whom we visited at Pascasmayo? I have a letter to you from him, although I had not expected to give myself the pleasure of presenting it until our return from the jungle."

He handed Don Emilio the letter of introduc-

tion, and after reading it, the Peruvian's manner became even more cordial.

"Every facility our little city can offer is yours during your stay, senors," he said affably. "You will, of course, make my poor abode your home while you are here. I have heard of you both. The fame of your explorations in New Guinea and Arabia has penetrated even to this out-of-the-way spot. Now, senors, tell me how I can first serve you?"

Billy explained their difficulty with the dirty gasoline and asked if he might procure a cloth through which to strain it. "We are on our way to Moyobamba to learn more about Doctor Stanton. He left that place, headed south, about a year ago, and has not been heard of since," he ended. "We must, therefore, go on this afternoon, I fear."

Don Emilio lifted his hands in astonishment. "Is that so? Then, senors, your accident this morning, though unpleasant, was decidedly providential." He beamed upon them delightedly. "I, Emilio Mesia, have news of the Senor Stanton, and of no longer ago than yesterday. Come then, we will have your airship towed to the municipal dock. The cloth for screening the gasoline will be

forthcoming. Then after lunch and the siesta, we shall discuss the matter of the lost explorer."

And so their program was settled. The amphibian was towed to the wharf, a bolt of heavy cotton cloth was brought, and while Mr. Smith and Don Emilio went on to the latter's house, Billy set to work, draining his motor and tanks, his every movement watched by an enthusiastic and curious crowd of townsfolk.

By noon he had completed his task, and leaving the plane under guard, he walked uptown.

From the river, Balsas had appeared to be a city of some size, but at close range it showed the usual array of adobe houses and shops, in the usual state of dilapidation.

The town, Billy learned, had been founded in the sixteenth century; and after a glance at the archaic structures which lined the narrow streets, he decided that it certainly looked its age. The location and general plan were good, but as a city, Balsas could only be classed with many other primitive towns of the interior. In view of its remoteness, he wondered that it had stood the test of time as well as it had.

The deputy's residence proved to be a building larger and more imposing than its neighbors,

and after luncheon and the siesta or noonday nap, which is part of the daily routine of every Peruvian household, rich or poor, the Smiths met their host again in his walled garden behind the house.

"You must know, Don Emilio," began the Smith senior, "that my son and I have been commissioned by the Natural History Museum of New York to find Dr. Stanton, if possible; or failing that, to learn more of his disappearance and that of his party, who were bent on a study of bird life in the jungle of the Upper Amazon. What you told us aboard the plane this morning, naturally interests us greatly."

"Just so," the Don remarked. "The Senor Doctor and his party stopped at Balsas on their way east last year. I had the honor of entertaining him at my poor home here. An interesting man, Senor Stanton—but like many savants, not particularly amenable to suggestions."

"I know him well," observed Mr. Smith with a laugh. "He is a celebrated ornithologist, but the most stubborn man living. That is, if he still lives —poor fellow. You did not agree with his plan of procedure, Don Emilio?"

"Of course I did not presume to tell the Doctor how he should organize his expedition," hedged

the deputy, "but I did advise his taking a route into the Mangeroma Indian country beyond the mountains—other than the one he chose to follow. His plan was to take the trail over the Calle Calle or Hush-Hush Pass, as the old Incas named it, to Chachapoyas, and from there to Moyobamba on the Moyo. From that place he was to go down the Mayo, which unlike most of the rivers in the country, flows southeast rather than northeast, to where it empties into the Huallaga River. Then his plan was to strike out east by south, crossing the Ucayali and Javary Rivers and on to his destination, a matter of three hundred miles or so through a practically unknown section of the Andes. Those mountains traversed, he must form his own trail through Montana jungles, absolutely unexplored.

"The route, to me, was quite impossible, senors. To cross the mountains on foot one must follow given trails and passes, but—to attempt to cross hundreds of miles of unknown tropical jungle, inhabited only by cannibals—!" Don Emilio shrugged expressively.

"And you proposed another route?" asked Billy.

"Quite so, senor. I suggested that from Moyo-

bamba he follow the trail northeast to Balzapuerto and from there north and east by canoe on the Paranapura and Huallaga Rivers to the Maranon. Eastward on that great river to where the Itechoahy joins it and then southwest up the Itechoahy to the town of Remate de Males which is in touch with the inland port of Iquitos on the Amazon by weekly steam launch. At Remate de Males he could rest and reorganize his expedition and then take other canoes up the Itechoahy a hundred and fifty miles or so to the Mangeroma country."

"And he refused your advice?"

"He did—said he wasn't going a thousand miles around, when he could go across country but three hundred, to get the birds he sought."

"And you told him that without an airplane one must travel this country by trail and river, or—be lost, I suppose," commented Mr. Smith.

"I did not go so far as that, senor; I merely said I thought his plan impossible and that the longest way round is often the shortest way home. Now comes the sequel," he added. "A messenger sent by the Brazilian officials at Remate de Males arrived here yesterday on his way to Lima and the American Ambassador, with the only word which

has come from Senor Stanton since he left all civilization a year ago. I have asked the man, who continues west tomorrow, to stop in here and show you what he carries after the evening meal. Ah, here comes Manuel," he broke off as a servant appeared. "Dinner is ready, I see. Later we shall interview the messenger."

CHAPTER II

THE GOLD CHALICE

After their early dinner, coffee was served in the deputy's comfortable sitting room before an open fire. The Andean chill of evening had already settled down on the little town.

Presently Manuel ushered in a wiry individual whose swarthy complexion and high cheekbones bespoke Indian blood.

"Good evening, senors," he greeted them from the doorway, bowing with the air of a Spanish grandee.

"Good evening, Triana," replied Don Emilio. "These are the American gentlemen of whom I spoke this morning. Be seated, my friend, and smoke a cigar with us. Then perhaps you will be good enough to show us the package you carry and to tell these gentlemen what you have already told me."

Triana bowed again and accepted the proffered cigar, which he lit by flicking the end of his match with a grubby thumbnail.

"With the greatest of pleasure, Senor Deputy

and gentlemen," he answered, and seated himself on the edge of a chair. "It is a great honor for Jose Triana to be of service."

"That's quite all right," said Don Emilio smoothly, as the man paused in evident embarrassment. "Let us hear your news."

"Good," said Triana with a smile. "Then, you must know that a few days before I left Remate de Males where I now reside, an Indian from the Upper Itechoahy River country offered a metal cup for sale to the principal storekeeper of my town. This cup appeared to be of gold, very beautiful and handsomely chased. So valuable did the storekeeper believe it to be that he took it, together with its Indian owner, to Colonel Adolfo Cavero, Prefect of the Department, who pronounced the chalice Inca work, hundreds of years old. But, stranger still, some English words were found to be scratched on the inside of the cup, and were signed plainly—'Stanton'. Upon being closely questioned, the Indian swore he had never heard of the explorer, Senor Stanton. He said he had found the cup on the shore of Lake Innocence, which lies some fifty miles up river from Remate de Males. That was all that could be

learned from the man, so he was paid and allowed to return to his tribe."

"How is it that you are taking this cup to Lima?" asked Mr. Smith. "Your town, if I recall correctly, is on the Brazilian side of the Itechoahy."

"The senor is perfectly informed," replied Triana. "The Senor Colonel Cavero, who knew of the Senor Stanton's disappearance, radioed at once to Rio de Janeiro, stating the case and asking for orders. The message he received in answer told him to send the cup to Lima, as the Senor Doctor Stanton was last seen in Peru and the authorities there had already been in correspondence with the United States regarding his disappearance and were about to investigate the matter."

"How long ago was that?" asked Billy.

"Just thirty-three days ago, Senor. I started the next day and I have been thirty-two days on the way, so far."

"Great guns!" exclaimed Billy. "With our plane we could be there in a few hours!"

"But you fly straight like the birds," smiled Triana, "while I must go far north and around by river and trail. Travelling thus one can do but a few miles a day."

"May we see the chalice, Triana?" inquired Mr. Smith, who was impatient of this interruption.

"Certainly, senor," returned the ever polite Brazilian. "It is for that I came." He opened his ragged woolen poncho or cloak and from within its voluminous folds drew forth a bag of soft leather. From this he produced the cup which he handed to Mr. Smith with still another bow.

For several minutes the explorer studied the cup, with Billy at his side.

"Looks like a champagne glass, only larger," declared that young man. "It's a cinch the Incas didn't have prohibition wished on them."

"It is a very beautiful vessel," said Mr. Smith, fingering the long, gold stem and its rounded base. "But the workmanship, though similar in certain respects, is not Inca. We will take that up later. First, I want you to read those words scratched in the bowl. They are very faint, and your eyes are better than mine."

Billy took the cup and held it under the light of an oil lamp on the center table.

"The scratches are nearly rubbed out," he remarked, studying them intently. "It reads, so far as I can tell—'In Chib—' there are more letters

to that word but they are too faint to read," he interrupted himself. "Then comes the word 'city'; that is quite plain. After 'city' is another blur—two letters, I think. Then—yes it is 'Mangeroma'. And last, 'Stanton'."

Mr. Smith was writing busily in his notebook while he listened intently to Billy's words. "Then," he announced, "it reads like this." He passed over his notebook for the benefit of the others, who read—"In Chib—city—Mangeroma. Stanton."

"I think we can get more out of those scratches than appears on the surface now," he continued. "'Chib' is quite evidently 'Chibcha'. The blurs after 'city' probably stand for the direction that place lies from the Mangeroma country,—N.E., for northeast, S.W., for southwest, or whatever it may be.—Too bad the direction is missing. Otherwise, with our airplane we would not be long in locating this Chibcha city."

"But there is no city called Chibcha in either Peru or Brazil," broke in Don Emilio excitedly.

"Let me explain," Mr. Smith interjected with a smile at the little man's vehemence. "The Chibcha Empire, for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years, was located in what is now Colombia.

When I tell you that it was second only to that of the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico, you will realize that they were a very considerable people. The Chibcha were highly cultured. They had their codes of law, their division of time, their rules and customs in all matters pertaining to family life and administration of government. They tilled the soil, they believed in the immortality of the soul, they reverenced their dead, and practised barter according to well defined regulations. They were immensely wealthy and like the Incas to the south, had great hoards of gold and precious stones in their treasury. The chasing on this cup is undoubtedly Chibcha workmanship—not Inca," he ended.

"In 1537, son, the Spaniards under Jimenez de Quesada, conquered the country. The thousands and thousands of soldiers which the Zipa or King of the Chibchas commanded against the white men were overawed, rather than overcome by force. The greater sagacity of the Spaniards, together with their courage, soon made them masters of the land, and Quesada founded the city of Bogota. Those Chibchas who were not killed were enslaved or disappeared from off the face of the earth."

"While Quesada and his men grew rich on plundered treasure," supplemented Don Emilio. "Another case like those of Pizarro in Peru and Cortez in Mexico, I fancy."

Mr. Smith shook his head. "Not quite," he dissented. "To speak of this conquest of the Chibcha Empire recalls the fact that the land of Bogota was really the land of El Dorado. El Dorado, the gilt one, the man covered with gold. And all chroniclers and historians of the early period are agreed as to the origin of that tradition."

"Do tell us about it, Dad," said Bill eagerly. "Let's hear how Quesada and his brute followers were done out of the treasure!"

"Yes," seconded Don Emilio, "pray proceed, Senor. I am learning things about South America which I never knew before."

"Very well, then. The King of the Chibchas, among whom power and property passed from uncle to nephew by law of inheritance, was called as I have said, the Zipa. His power as a monarch was absolute. But to attain the dignity of what we should nowadays call the Crown Prince, and to become in due course King, it was not enough to be a nephew—or even the right nephew. The

prospective heir to the throne had to qualify himself by passing through an ordeal which princes of other nations and other times would certainly find most obnoxious. He had to live in a cave for six years, fasting the whole time, with limited rations, barely sufficient to sustain life. No meat or salt were to be eaten during that period. He must see no one, with the exception of his male servants, nor was he even allowed to gaze upon the sun. Only after sunset and before sunrise might he come out of the cave.

"The consecration, so to speak, of the Zipa, took the form of a most elaborate ceremony. The prospective Zipa would be carried upon a special sort of frame so arranged that twenty men standing beneath could lift it upon their shoulders, to one of the five sacred lakes that still exist in the plateau, generally to Guatavita. There, stripped, his body was smeared with a resinous substance, and sprinkled with large quantities of gold dust. After this process, of course, the man appeared very like a statue of gold. Two other high dignitaries or chiefs, called Caciques, as nude as the Zipa, would go with him upon a raft of twisted reeds and slowly paddle into the centre of the lake.

"All round the shore gathered a dense crowd, burning a kind of aromatic herb which sent up clouds of pungent smoke. On every hand the sound of music, primitive and harsh, as was customary at all ceremonies. On the raft at the feet of the Zipa lay a huge pile of gold and emeralds. Each of his companions, too, was given gold and emeralds wherewith to propitiate the god in whose honor the ceremony was performed. One of the chiefs on the raft would then raise a white flag and wave it. The noise on the shores increased with the pitch of excitement. The Zipa finally was to throw into the lake all the gold and jewels, his companions to follow his example, and the people ashore likewise make their offerings. Thus, after six years' fasting, the Zipa was anointed and qualified for Kingship.

"I am telling you all this," he concluded, "because legend has it that when the last Zipa knew that his empire had fallen to the Spaniards, he collected all the gold and jewels, placed them on rafts and flung them, together with himself, into the deep waters of one of the holy lakes, as a last, desperate offering to his gods. However, little of that vast treasure was recovered by his conquer-

ors; for each of the five lakes is very large and very deep. . . ."

"Good for old Zipa!" cried Bill. "He double-crossed those fellows to a fare-you-well!"

Mr. Smith smiled indulgently, and remarked in a casual tone, "But—I am beginning to think that the Zipa did no such thing."

"What?" exclaimed Don Emilio. "You believe—"

"I *think*—" corrected Mr. Smith, "that perhaps the Zipa merely had it rumored that he had done this, and in reality went into the mountains or jungle far to the southeast where he founded a city far from the haunts of the oppressor."

"And where the Chibcha nation live today?" Bill was dubious.

"Possibly," Mr. Smith replied.

"It is known, of course, that there are vast territories still unexplored, in both Peru and Brazil," explained Don Emilio, as Bill would have spoken.

Triana, who had almost wriggled off his chair in his excitement, now entered the discussion.

"For many years," he chirped, "rumors have come from the jungle of a tribe of white Indians of great learning and culture—though no white

man, if he has found them, has ever come back to tell the story. Could these rumors be connected with the Chibchas, do you think, Senor?"

"But the Chibchas, like the Incas, must have been brown, not white," interposed Billy.

"On the other hand," countered his father, "the Chibchas may have intentionally mingled their race with that of the white man, by abducting, from time to time, a certain number of Spanish, Peruvian or Brazilian women, and in that way, gradually lightened the color. Like most rumors, Triana, there is usually some truth behind them."

"A most interesting fancy," Don Emilio remarked politely.

Mr. Smith relit his pipe. "So interesting, senor," he declared between puffs, "that my son and I shall start in our plane for Remate de Males at daybreak. From there we shall go up the Itechoahy to that Mangeroma Indian country which Stanton writes of on this Chibcha cup."

Don Emilio's heavy eyebrows expressed his surprise. "Then you really believe that the Chibchas have captured him?"

"I have no reason to doubt it, senor."

"But the Mangeroma Indians are the most

savage tribe of cannibals in South America!" the little man exploded. "They will shoot you full of poisoned arrows from their blowguns. It is said they even poison the streams and springs in their country. Cruelty is rampant among them. No outsider has ever come back, unless terribly tortured —and usually all interlopers are devoured. To make matters worse, they live in an almost impenetrable jungle. Think well, senors, before you venture among those terrible people!"

Mr. Smith looked at his son gravely. "What do you say, Bill?"

Bill squared his shoulders. "I say that our job is—to find Dr. Stanton. In view of what we learned tonight, that means a trip into this Indian country. I'll admit that Don Emilio doesn't paint a very pretty picture, but if we get into a tight place—well, we've been in tight places before. Poisoned water sounds pretty rotten—but we've got plenty of condensed milk and our supplies call for bottled water, anyway! I'll say goodnight, gentlemen. I want to give Old Trail Eater a good going-over before we start in the morning—and Dad says daybreak!—Goodnight, Don Emilio."

"Goodnight—goodnight, senor," called the others, and the door closed behind Bill.

Don Emilio rose and kicked a log on the hearth into flame. "Senor Smith," he said slowly, "my son died with his mother when he was born. Had he lived, I should want him no different from that young fellow. You, sir, are a lucky man!"

"I think so, too," said Mr. Smith. He gave the little man his hand in a clasp of silent understanding.

CHAPTER III

OVER THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

It was nearly seven next morning before Bill and his father got aboard the amphibian. Although the high peaks of the Andes had glimmered in sunlight for over an hour, the little town of Balsas, in the valley far below, was still shrouded in the gray cloak of early dawn.

The entire population had turned out to watch the airplane's departure, crowding the dock, the bridge and river banks in their eagerness to view the novel sight.

With a last wave of his hand to Don Emilio and Triana at the wharf's edge, Billy ordered their mooring cast off and taxied toward the middle of the river.

With his stick held well back of neutral and slightly to the right to depress left aileron, he gradually accelerated the engine and with his foot depressing left rudder pedal, swung the amphibian into the wind. With a straight course ahead he steadily gave the engine more gas until the throttle was wide open. At the same time he

pulled the stick all the way back in order to raise the bow of the hull out of the water.

A few seconds later Billy pushed the stick all the way forward so as to raise the tail and depress the nose. But as the hull was now moving at some speed and bow at such a time cannot be depressed into the water, the plane was therefore gradually forced out of the stream until they were skimming along on the step.

At that stage of the take off, Billy eased the stick back to neutral and maintained it there while speed was being gathered. And of course from now on he paid particular attention to his lateral balance.

Every student aviator learns in training that a plane must not take off until speed adequate to complete control has been attained. He also learns that any attempt to pull it off prematurely will result in a take off at stalling point, where control is uncertain.

So that although Bill saw rocks rearing their heads in the channel before him, he took his time. Then as flying speed was gained, a momentary pressure of his elevators broke the hull out of the water. This slight pressure he eased immediately after the instant of take off.

When a plane leaves the water its speed is only slightly above minimum flying speed. Any decrease would consequently result in a stall. It is therefore essential that the nose be kept level for six or eight seconds in order to attain a safe margin above the stalling point before a climb is begun. This is particularly necessary to guard against the contingency of engine failure. If that should occur while the plane were in a stalled condition after a take off, control would be immediately lost and could not be regained before the plane dropped back into the water.

Bill's chief difficulty lay in the fact that the valley ahead narrowed abruptly; about a mile further on it seemed to end in a precipice which rose like a giant breakwater high into the mists about the peaks. In reality the river had cut a gorge through the mountains centuries before from another and higher valley, whence it cascaded in a series of foaming waterfalls, dropping several thousand feet in less than a couple of miles.

As Bill began to nose the amphibian upward he saw the waterfalls, terraced above him to the left, while straight ahead was the precipice over which no motor could climb at that distance. For

the instant he was stumped—a nervous shiver of anxiety ran down his spine.

He could not turn up the gorge over the falls because, when starting to turn out of a climb, the nose of an airplane must always be dropped to level before ailerons and rudder can be applied. If Bill pulled his plane's nose up above level on the turn in order to climb, a stall would result and with the wing down the plane would in all probability go into a spin.

Instead, Bill kept on his straight climb toward the precipice.

"Buckle on your safety-belt, Dad!" he called. "Hold tight! I've got to do a split-S."

Mr. Smith, knowing what was coming, was too busy getting ready to answer at the moment.

Bill, on his part, had plenty to keep him occupied. First, he pulled the stick slowly but steadily back, with rudder and ailerons in neutral. The nose of the plane was thereby raised until an angle of approximately 60 degrees to the horizontal was reached. Just prior to the moment of stalling he applied full right rudder, causing the nose to fall off on that side. This manoeuver, essentially a half-roll, sent Old Trail Eater partially over

on its back, to emerge from the resultant side-dive headed in the opposite direction.

The big amphibian, after being shot upward, turned sideways and down, a bare hundred yards from the face of the precipice, now skimmed down the valley the way they had come.

Bill had the plane just where he wanted her at last. With an accelerated speed brought about by their dive and the velocity of the wind on their tail, he started to climb again before reaching Balsas. A few more minutes of steady climbing and they had topped the range, with the valley of the Maranon far to the rear.

"And that's what I call a mighty pretty exhibition of flight acrobatics and quick thinking—" Smith senior remarked admiringly into his transmitter— "I realized you couldn't fly up that gully at our altitude then. It looked to me as if we were headed straight for the mountainside when you shot us up and into that split-S turn. Good work, Bill! Now, what course will you take to Remate de Males?"

"The quickest possible, Dad. Northeast for the next couple of hundred miles. I'll head for the town of Yurimaquas on the Huallaga River. From there we can follow the river north until it

empties into the Maranon; and then northeast, keeping that river in sight to where the Ucayali joins it and the Maranon becomes the Amazon. At that point we can strike out over the jungle, east to the Javary and down that river—to Remate de Males."

"In other words," Mr. Smith studied the map, "in order to keep within landing distance of those rivers, you propose going far to the north and adding several hundred miles to our trip?"

"Well, that's up to you, Dad. It is the safer plan, of course—"

Mr. Smith smiled to himself. "But you'd rather strike due east from Yurimaquas—take the short cut over the mountains to the Ucayali and on to the Javary, down that stream to Remate de Males?"

"That's it, Dad. Of course, we'd be flying over unexplored country that way, but it is much shorter. We're taking big chances either way, but the engine is running like a charm this morning. What do you say?"

"Take the straight route, son." Mr. Smith was not going to spoil his son's plans. "It is a long hop at best, and we'll save both time and gas. How long do you figure it will take, barring accidents?"

Bill scanned the map tacked to the side of the cockpit. "Between eight and nine hours, I should say," he replied presently. "It all depends upon the wind, of course. With luck we ought to be there between three and four o'clock this afternoon."

Mr. Smith made no comment and Bill turned his entire attention to the guiding of the plane once more. Below them, range after range of snow-capped peaks sparkled in the clear sunlight, out toward a cloudless horizon. The deep valleys over which they flew looked grim and bare, in most cases totally uninhabited. Occasionally a few heavily thatched roofs could be seen clustered beside a foaming stream, but they were flying too high to take in much detail.

Oddly enough, there seemed to be little or no wind at this great height, though with the aid of field glasses, Bill could make out swirls of snow about the peaks beneath. It grew intensely cold. Both Bill and his father were glad for the protection of the fur-lined jackets they wore.

"What's the speedometer say, Bill?"

"We're doing our maximum—124 miles per hour. I figure our ground speed is about equal to our airspeed in this quiet air. We ought to pass

over Yurimaquas by nine o'clock if this keeps up."

Bill was as good as his word, for the hands of his wrist-watch marked 9:10 exactly as they swooped down over the broad valley where, nestling on the river bank, lay the little city of adobe houses, dilapidated, but picturesque from the air.

After circling the town, Bill nosed the plane up again, this time heading due east. For the next hour the landscape beneath them remained much the same. Then gradually the mountains grew lower and the timberline higher along their rugged flanks. After crossing the broad stream of the Ucayali River they found themselves flying over rolling hills, banked in the multi-shaded green of the jungle. These hills, the last ripples of the Andes, seemed suddenly to die away below them and to dissolve into a billowing ocean of treetops, extending as far as the eye could see.

The Ucayali, which had been confined by the mountains in its upper reaches to the straight and narrow path, was free at last, here, to meander, and in sheer delight went twisting, racing through the forest until completely lost in its remoteness. The horizon was gigantically endless; the vast

stretch of forest across Brazil to the very shores of the Atlantic, fantastic to contemplate.

Then from the south came a crosswind, bringing with it heavy clouds, black and ominous. Flying conditions rapidly changed. Huge drops of rain splashed down from the darkened sky and before long a deluge set in. The upper wing section became a waterfall and rain poured off every part of the speeding airplane in a perpetual stream.

Yet within ten minutes the storm had blown over and a dazzling sun came out, as if to apologize for the inconvenience the rain had caused the pilot.

Presently a sparkling line of silver came in sight, twisting through the forest like a bejeweled serpent on a bed of emerald green.

"There's the Javary, at last," called Bill. He pushed his stick forward and eventually leveled off at an altitude of five hundred feet, so as to get a more intimate view of the country.

"Are you going to follow the river down to Remate de Males?" asked Mr. Smith from the cabin.

"I think not, Dad. Although it twists and turns a lot, the Javary flows northeast for the next

couple of hundred miles before turning east and then southeast. If this map is right, a course due east over the jungle will bring us back to the river a few miles above the town. How about it?"

"Steer the straight course, Bill. I want to get there as soon as possible."

"And I," observed his son, "want to get outside of some grub as soon as I can. This kind of work always makes me hungry. How about chow, Dad—it's nearly noon?"

"I'm way ahead of you," replied his father, "here it is." He appeared in the cockpit with a tray of sandwiches and a long glass of lemonade. "Tell me," he asked, looking down on the wilderness of living green below, "what could you do in case of a forced landing in this jungle?"

"Crash," was Bill's laconic reply as he munched his bread and meat. Then, as he saw his father's face, he grinned. "Treetops look mighty pretty from the air, but what they do to a plane is a caution. We're taking some wild chances this trip, Dad, and from the way Triana and Don Emilio talked, our real troubles haven't started.—Pass me another sandwich, please. This ham is wonderful!"

CHAPTER IV

REMATE DE MALES

For more than three hours Bill piloted Old Trail Eater due east by the compass over a never-ending sea of green. Through his field glasses he could see brilliantly colored birds and butterflies disporting themselves in the sunlight above the treetops. The only breaks in the dense jungle came when they sighted a sluggish stream bound north to the Javary or when the plane passed over the shining waters of some lake lost in the depths of this wilderness.

"I'll bet this is an awful country to tramp over," observed Billy into the phone, his eyes on the jungle forest below. "This is the dry season, isn't it?—although everything seems to be dripping wet down there, in spite of the heat."

Billy and his father had sometime earlier discarded their heavy outer garments for running shirts and shorts.

"Rather, because of the heat, son," rejoined his father. "But we shouldn't be here unless it were the dry season. We'll probably have plenty of

jungle trailing to do before we get through this Amazon country. It is utterly impassable during the rainy season except by way of its water highways. Do you realize, Bill, that during the wet months, an area equal in size to about a third of the United States is entirely submerged? And in all this immense territory there are only a few spots of sufficient elevation to be left high and dry?"

"Some job we're on this time," remarked his son. "I'm beginning to believe that the old needle-in-the-haystack game is easy compared to finding Dr. Stanton in this weird country."

"It's a wonderfully beautiful country—"

"Raspberries!" grumbled Bill. "You can have it. The smell of rotting vegetation is sickening, even up here. It's worse than the mangrove swamps were in New Guinea—and that's going some! What brings people to a country like this, Dad?"

"Rubber, principally. It is gathered on the shores of the Javary and Itechoahy rivers and transported by launch or canoe down to Remate de Males. There it is shipped directly or sold to traveling dealers who send it to Manaos or Para via the Amazon Navigation Company—their boat

comes up during the rainy season. From there it goes out to the ports of the world. But it's about a 2000 mile run up the Amazon from Para on the Atlantic coast to Remate de Males. . . ."

"Some river trip—how long does it take?"

"Between thirty and forty days, depending on the steamer."

"Well, I prefer this bus," said Billy decisively. "Thunderation!" he added a moment later—"I've figured this wind drift to the south all wrong. There's a river ahead, but it can't be the Javary. It's too broad—"

"And there is a river steamer, if I'm not mistaken," and Mr. Smith pointed his glasses on a plume of smoke which hung lazily over the brooding forest.

"I've got it—" called Billy. "The last stream we crossed must have been the Itechoahy, above Remate de Males. I thought we were too far south—for the past quarter of an hour I've been heading into the north a bit. That's the Amazon ahead—or I'm a ground hog!'

As they drew nearer they saw below them a great river, dotted with green islets, and measuring fully a mile between banks at this dry time of year. Slowly navigating the winding channel a

large steamer churned its way upstream, a common enough sight on the Atlantic or Pacific, perhaps, but seeming incongruous in the middle of the South American continent.

Flying low, Bill circled the steamer, whose passengers lined the rails, waving hats and handkerchiefs. Then he turned the plane's nose upstream and soon all that could be seen of the river leviathan was the same plume of gray smoke, wafting skyward, that had been the first sign of the ship's presence on the river.

"She must be on her way to Iquitos," Mr. Smith told Billy. "I want to stop there on our way home. Iquitos is a fine city, by all accounts, and although nearly in the middle of the continent, it is Peru's largest port."

"How about the town we're bound for now?"

"Not much of a place, I expect. With luck we'll spend only one night there. I want to get on in the morning."

"There's the Javary at last," broke in Billy, as a broad river came into view to the left, emptying its waters into the Amazon. With a farewell glance at that great stream, he turned up the other river, in itself no small body of water, for here its width was nearly half a mile.

"And now," said Mr. Smith as they sped along, "we are flying directly over the border line between the two countries. That is Peru on our right, and the left bank is Brazilian territory."

"I'd exchange both of 'em for a little slice of the good old U.S.A.," declared Bill. "The more I see of this part of the world, the more homesick I get for God's country. South America—or what I've seen of it from the air—is nothing but mountains and jungle. Grand—beautiful, if you like—but no country for an aviator. I'd rather fly the Atlantic any time."

"I know you've been under a strain today, son," said his father, as he stood beside him, field glasses to his eyes. "But there is our next port of call ahead. See that cluster of houses on the left bank, where the other river flows into the Javary? That is Remate de Males, Brazil."

Five minutes later Billy had nosed down to a crosswind landing on the broad stream and was taxiing slowly toward the little town.

" 'Remate de Males'—Culmination of Evils," he mused. "It sure is well named—and we've come all this way—to that! Punkville-in-the-Swamp!" he exclaimed disgustedly, and cut his motor.

Soon the plane had nosed into the low muddy bank, while eager hands of the natives caught their line and made it secure to a post of rusty iron.

Mr. Smith sprang ashore at once, to be greeted by officials of the town, while Bill, under pretense of going over his engine, studied the outlook with no particular interest.

Fringing the river and on the edge of the forest swamps, lay the single street of the town, ramshackle houses built on poles, on the whole, a desolate sight. Remate de Males, built at the junction of the Javary and Itechoahy rivers, close to the equator, is a dismal place. Yet, separated as it is by weeks and weeks of journey by boat from the nearest civilization, in reality it presents a monument to man's nature-conquering instincts and ability. Surely no pioneers ever had a harder battle than these Brazilians, standing with one foot in "the white man's grave," as the Javary region is called in South America, while they faced innumerable dangers.

These circumstances dawned upon Billy as he took in his surroundings. The hundred-odd houses of the town faced the river bank. All were very primitive, and all elevated on palm-trunk poles as

far as possible above the usual high-water mark of the river. Everything, from the little sheet-iron church to the pigsties, was built on poles.

"Gosh," he remarked in an undertone to his father as he joined him ashore. "If there's anything in evolution, it won't be many generations before the inhabitants and domestic animals of this place are born equipped with stilts!"

But his father ignored this sarcasm. "Come and meet some of these gentlemen," he said in Spanish, as they moved toward the small group awaiting them.

Bill was introduced to several of the government officials, including the superintendent of the town and the chief of police. The latter was a man of prepossessing appearance, but his complexion was that of the confirmed alcoholic. When first greetings were over and the little party pushed their way through the crowd of excited inhabitants, to the Hotel de Augusto in the center of the town, Billy began to marvel that any human could survive existence in this pestilential country. Whisky and quinine appeared to be their chief mainstay, and evidently they did not stint themselves of either.

The hotel, the town "sky-scraper," boasted a

story and a quarter. There were two large rooms through the center of the building, one at the front and one at the rear: at each side were four small rooms. The room at the front was used as a dining room and bar. It was furnished with two broad tables of planed palm trunks and corresponding benches, at which the party were seated to celebrate the arrival of these unexpected guests.

As Bill did not drink whisky, he excused himself and started on a tour of inspection while his father told their host the reason for this visit.

The side rooms adjoining the bar, he judged to be bedrooms, generally speaking. At present, they seemed to be used as quarters for stray goats and pigs—a convenient place to escape the fierce rays of the sun. Each room was chastely and neatly furnished with a pair of iron hooks from which to hang a hammock, an article one was evidently expected to furnish for oneself, as there were no hammocks in sight. There was nothing in the rooms except the hooks, the animals and several bird-eating spiders, crawling on the iron partitions that formed the walls. The floors were built of sections of palm trees, with the flat side down, making a succession of ridges with about an inch between, through which the ground below was

visible. Bill decided then and there he would sleep aboard Old Trail Eater that night, and walked out of the place.

Sauntering down the street, he passed the *Intendencia,* or Government House, painted blue; the post-office, yellow; the *Recreio Popular,* pink. Farther "down town," he came across the church, which was unpainted. These buildings, the principal points of interest, were one and all most unpretentious. Their main point of difference, architecturally, from the rest of the village, consisted in more utterly neglected facades.

Bill had had enough of this Brazilian outpost. He went back to the plane and with a vivid remembrance of the spiders, scorpions and other crawling and poisonous vermin he had seen, proceeded to moor her on the river some distance from the shore.

Even here the heat and stinging insects were terrible. At last he hauled his mosquito-net out on the narrow deck, and rigged himself a bug-proof tent.

Across the Javary on the Peruvian side, a small cluster of sheet-iron houses on stilts proclaimed the village of Nazareth.

"Gee whiz!" he said to himself, "I never

guessed the jumping-off place would have a suburb!"

Half an hour later Mr. Smith was rowed out and came aboard.

"Learn anything?" questioned Billy.

"No more than Triana told us last night. But they gave me some pointers on the country up the Itechoahy. From all accounts, this seems to be a pretty tough country, boy."

"Well, the country can't be worse than the cities," grinned Billy. "Give me the jungle to those dumps on the river banks, any day. What are the plans?"

"Tomorrow morning we'll take aboard some more provisions—also gas and oil. Then we'll hop up the river forty or fifty miles until we sight Lake Innocence. That is where the Indian found the chalice with Stanton's name on it, you know. After that, we'll be—er—guided by circumstance."

Billy got to his feet and rolled up his mosquito net. "Circumstance and Billy Smith are going to guide us upward within the next five minutes," he announced.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to take off."

"Now?"

"As soon as possible."

"What for?"

"To get the mosquitoes out of the cabin. Once we're up the breeze will blow them out if we open the ports and the windows of the cockpit. Then you can put in the screens—we'll come down—get supper aboard, and be able to get a half-way decent night's rest. Savez?"

"Get in to the cockpit and start your engine idling," ordered Mr. Smith. "I'm going to haul in the anchor—right now."

CHAPTER V

INTO THE UNKNOWN

FLYING low next morning, between the heavy mist and the dew-soaked jungle, Bill headed Old Trail Eater up the Itechoahy. As they rounded bend after bend in the river, the same magnificent forest scenery was repeated over and over again. Sometimes they would sight a tall matamata tree standing in a natural clearing, entirely covered with a luxuriant growth of the beautiful parasites that abound in the tropics; sometimes a slender palm, beside the white trunk of an embauba tree, with its umbrella-shaped crown of hanging plants, along the river's brim. The color and beauty of the scene were beyond description.

As they sped along the roar of their motor sent thousands of brilliantly plumaged birds whirling out among the branches of the trees. Occasionally, a thatched hut on poles, surrounded by a banana grove would mark the abode of some lone rubber hunter. Then for miles the ever-changing display of the jungle's floral splendor unfolded below them, untouched by the hand of man.

As the sun rose higher and dispersed the mist, the heat became terrific.

Billy, stripped to underclothes, spoke into the phone. "Do you know, Dad, that the thermometer in here registers 112 degrees? And that's in the shade with the windows open?"

"Yes? But we've got to expect even hotter weather before we round up Stanton."

"Humph!" Bill's further silence spoke volumes.

Then in a little while he said: "You spoke last night of stopping at a large rubber plantation down this way. About fifteen miles this side of Lake Innocence, you said. That would make it not more than thirty-five from Remate de Males. We've flown a good fifty miles already. Yet we can't have missed both the plantation and the lake —if they're near the river—flying this low."

"Distances in this part of the world are pretty much a matter of guess work, Bill," replied his father. "The country has never been properly mapped. The climate makes the people lazy and lackadaisical. . . . Keep on as you're going. We are bound to sight the Floresta Plantation soon. It's the largest rubber estate in this part of the world. The holding covers an area somewhat

larger than Long Island, and employs a great many people, so there are sure to be a number of houses."

"O.K."

It was not until they had flown over ninety miles by his reckoning, that Bill caught a view of the plantation.

"You want to land here?"

"Yes—I want to talk with the owner, *Coronel* da Silva. The Indian brought the chalice to him first. I want to learn all I can of that native and his tribe."

Bill cut his gun and nosed down to the river, landing a few yards off the high bank. Mr. Smith dropped anchor and when the plane was securely moored, father and son went into the cabin to make themselves presentable.

Clad once more in soft shirt, white linen trousers and sneakers, they got their dinghy overside and paddled ashore.

A tall, fine-looking pajama-clad man of fifty met them at the water's edge.

"I am Rosendo da Silva," he said pleasantly in Brazilian Portuguese. "Welcome to Floresta!"

Mr. Smith named himself and Billy, and each

in turn went through the rather complicated manner of greeting practiced in this part of Brazil.

One man places his arm about the other's waist, resting the palm of the hand on his back; then with the other hand, pats him on the shoulder—or as near that point as can be reached!

To Billy it seemed like the preliminaries to a wrestling bout. He had undergone it the afternoon before, but as yet was hardly proficient. Consequently, as he reached for da Silva, his foot slipped on the muddy bank, and he succeeded in throwing his host into the mire—and landed on top of him.

The planter made light of the accident, accepting Bill's stammered apologies with charming grace. Tactfully, he immediately began to converse in Spanish, to the great relief of the Smiths, and led the way up the steep river bank toward the plantation.

At the top of the bank they came upon a chattering crowd of rubber-workmen or *seringueiros*, as they are called, with their half-caste wives and children. Men and women and the older children were one and all smoking pipes of very strong tobacco. Billy noticed that the teeth of the women were without exception filed to sharp points, a

custom among the natives of this district, believed to enhance their beauty. But in Bill's private opinion it would take a good deal more than filed teeth to make them beautiful. Never before had he seen an uglier, more unprepossessing set of females.

Leaving the crowd on the bank watching the amphibian, Colonel da Silva led them to a group of plantation buildings raised on sixteen-foot poles, standing in the forest clearing. The owner's house would have been called unpretentious in any other place but the Amazon country. Here it represented the highest achievement of architecture and modern comfort. For a man of his enormous wealth, Colonel da Silva's tastes were simple, in the extreme. The house contained but seven rooms; though equipped with modern furniture, it was of most inexpensive grade.

In the living room and office of the plantation house, da Silva introduced the Smiths to his secretary. He proved to be also a person of breeding and education, but several years of health-racking existence in the swamps had made him indolent and nervous. Never once did Billy see his sombre face lighten in a smile.

"Be seated, my friends," Colonel da Silva motioned toward wicker armchairs.

A negress paddled into the room, carrying a tray of tiny cups filled with the usual, unsweetened jet-black coffee of the country. Billy watched her, a twinkle of amusement in his eye, for she was contentedly puffing a pipe!

"And now," continued the planter in his affable way, as he sipped his coffee, "please don't think me rude when I say you have come on what the English call a—wild duck chase—or is it wild goose?"

"Goose for choice," laughed Mr. Smith. "But why do you say that, Colonel?"

"Because, gentlemen, even with your airplane, you will never find Doctor Stanton. He is long dead—probably at the hands of cannibals. I am sure of it. You can do no more than share a like fate if you will continue this vain search."

Billy, who was perspiring profusely after the hot walk from the river and even hotter coffee, mopped his face with a wet handkerchief and interposed his own views.

"But you saw the gold chalice, Colonel! It is undoubtedly ancient Chibcha work, as my father explained to you on our walk over here. Why do

you think that Dad's theory won't hold water?"

"For the reason that, senor, there are no white Indians. That is an old wife's tale. Let me explain a few things to you gentlemen. Then perhaps you will be willing to accept my invitation to stop at my home for the rest of the summer. Here you can watch the rubber-work which is most interesting, and hunt the game in my forests with me. We shall have what you call a 'bully fine time'."

"Thanks very much—But I hardly think it possible—" began Mr. Smith.

"Please listen to me, first," the Brazilian implored. "You evidently do not realize that you are in the midst of a vast wilderness, stretching for hundreds of miles in every direction, populated with poisonous reptiles, wild beasts and man-eating savages—whose cruelty to enemies does not bear description. Except along a few of the larger rivers where there may be an occasional rubber plantation like Floresta, it is absolutely unexplored. Once lost in the jungle, there is no way out. Even though you were able to subsist for a few months, the wet season would drown you like rats. The Itechoahy before my door rises sixty-five feet at times. That is why even though the banks are very high here, we must build on posts."

Mr. Smith helped himself to a cigar from a box on the table.

"You certainly paint a terrifying picture, Colonel," he admitted thoughtfully, striking a light and exhaling a cloud of aromatic smoke. "But before I make any decision, or accept your kind invitation, I want to learn more about the man who found the chalice."

"Quite so, senor. First I must tell you that the river rises far to the south and flows in a northerly direction, as you know. My property is an egg-shaped tract extending west of the river for some fifty miles. Even within the boundaries of the plantation my rubber-hunters rarely dare enter the jungle off the trails we have hewn with our machetes. When I first came here, years ago, we discovered the remnants of an Indian tribe living just beyond my western line. There were only a few and we found them without exception, poor, broken-spirited creatures. It took but little persuasion to get them to enter my service. Today they live in huts scattered over the estate and I number them among the best of my rubber workers. What is more, they are now reasonably happy. Their story is that some years before I came here, a great tribe of terrible warriors liv-

ing beyond the hilly country to the west swooped down on their villages one night and either killed or carried off all but the few that I found. The killers were of the tribe called Mangeroma. Dr. Stanton was traveling toward their country when last heard of."

"Joao, my Indian rubber-worker, who claims he found the gold cup, belongs to the tribe the Mangeromas almost wiped out. Naturally, he hates them. He was missing from the plantation for some weeks. When he returned he brought me the chalice which he claims to have found on the shore of Lake Innocence. I am not prepared to say that this is strictly true—as I have found most of his tribe to be artistic liars. But I believe that what happened was this: Joao and one or two of his fellows went on a man hunt. It is a favorite sport of all these charming people hereabouts—and one reason why a white man is never without firearms in this region. To go on—Joao and his friends probably ran across a lone Mangeroma, undoubtedly blew one of their poisoned arrows into him—"

"Blew?" broke in Billy in surprise.

"Yes, senor—these people use blow-pipes—with incredible accuracy."

"I see—please continue, Colonel."

"My gentle rubber-workers," Colonel da Silva went on with a grimace, "then, most likely, made away with the Mangeroma—I shall not attempt to mention how. Strangely enough, the secret poison used by the natives, although it kills almost instantly, has no effect upon the cannibals who obtain their prey nearly always in this manner. And Joao, of course, found the chalice upon the dead Indian. But how did the Mangeroma get this cup? I say the Mangeroma got it from Stanton—who had probably been his prey sometime before. Stanton might have unearthed an ancient Chibcha city somewhere back in the Andes, on his way to the jungle, and took the cup as a relic of his discovery.—But all this is conjecture, I will admit, senors. Nevertheless, I have a firm conviction that truth lies in my words."

The planter stopped and lit his cigar, which during his long speech he had allowed to go out.

"You may be right," observed Mr. Smith, after a moment's silence. "From your intimate knowledge of these people, you have woven an interesting story, Colonel. May I further encroach upon your good humor by asking a favor?"

"*Esta casa e a suas ordenes*—this house is at

your disposal . . ." smiled the Brazilian courteously.

"Thank you—" returned his guest good-humoredly, "I have no designs upon your property, I assure you. What I want is half an hour's chat with Joao."

"You relieve me, senor," laughed da Silva. "I will send one of my men for him. They should arrive late this evening, then you can talk with him tomorrow morning."

"Is it so far, then?" asked Billy.

"It is a distance, young man, and traveling is slow work in this country. Although my property is west of the river, Joao is working a large park of rubber trees on the other side of the Itechoahy, about twenty miles upstream. My launch is at Remate de Males just now, so that means forty miles of paddling in a canoe, there and back. Marques, who will fetch Joao, will have several miles of jungle to cover, as well."

"Why, I can fly your man over to the lake in twenty minutes!"

"That would be splendid, senor. When will you start?"

"Right now—if it is agreeable to you. Then

we can be back in plenty of time for lunch. Won't you come, too? There is plenty of room."

The Colonel shook his head. "I've braved everything from savages to jungle fever," he smiled. "I expect to die with my boots on one of these days—but with my feet on solid ground, thank you. No, I would rather not go up in your airplane, senor Bill. But Marques will enjoy the thrill. He is usually ready for anything.—If your father will excuse us, we will go and find him now. Come along."

CHAPTER VI

LOST—

BILLY and Colonel da Silva climbed down the ladder-like steps which led from the front door of the house to the ground, and strolled toward the humbler *barracoas,* or huts of the rubber-workers.

In the clearing, palm trees and guava and brush formed a fairly thick covering for the ground, but compared with the surrounding impenetrable jungle, the square mile of open space deserved its title of "clearing." A few cows, a rare sight in that region, wandered about, nibbling at the sparse and sickly growth of grass. Small, bright green parrakeets flew overhead, filling the air with their shrill cries and from out the vastness of the forest the melancholy song of the *wacurao* piped musically.

The Colonel stopped before a hut larger than the others and called—"Marques!"

The mosquito-net which covered the entrance was pushed aside, a man peered out and then as he recognized his caller, he ran lightly down the

ladder and stood respectfully before them, hat in hand. He was a small, wiry-looking person whose dark coloring and high cheek-bones bespoke more than a trace of Indian blood.

"This gentleman is Senor Smith. You will speak Spanish with him, Marques," said the planter.

The man bowed and showed his white teeth in a smile.

"Mr. Smith is going to fly you over to Lake Innocence in his airplane. When you get there, find Joao. You three will then fly back to Floresta."

"Very good, Senor Colonel. I will send Jose to oversee the smoking of the rubber-milk for today."

"For this morning will be sufficient. You will be back before the lunch hour, Marques, and Senor Smith can take you to the lake in twenty minutes."

The foreman looked his surprise but made no comment and the three walked across the clearing to the bank of the river. The crowd of *seringueiros* were still watching the plane. The men doffed their hats and women bobbed politely to their master, standing to one side as he went down the steep slope, followed by Billy and Marques.

After a handshake with the Colonel, Billy and

Marques boarded the dinghy and paddled out to the amphibian. Billy soon had the engine idling, while the foreman looked on with deep interest. Then he placed Marques in the cabin, showed him how to adjust the phone-set and after explaining its use, went forward and hauled in the anchor.

Back at the controls, he swung the plane's nose about with the current. Then with a roaring motor, headed downstream, he took off into absolutely quiet air amid the cheers of the rubber-workers.

When Old Trail Eater had risen to an altitude of six hundred feet, Billy sent her into a steep bank to the left which brought them back over the plantation. Below and slightly ahead, he could see the *seringueiros* and Colonel da Silva, staring up at the plane, with gestures of wonder and alarm.

Bill cautioned his passenger to hold fast, and grinning wickedly, pushed his stick far forward. Over went Old Trail Eater's nose and with throttle wide open she dove at the excited group. But when they reached a point about a hundred feet above the scattering workmen and their wives, Billy pulled the stick all the way back. The plane bucked like a bronco, and zoomed upward and

away with her pilot waving a farewell over the side.

"I'm afraid I scared 'em pretty well," said Bill into his mouthpiece. "But I guess they've caught onto the joke by this time. How are you feeling, Marques?"

"Not so well, thank you, senor."

Bill glanced back through the open doorway to the cabin. The sun-bronzed features of Marques' countenance had changed to a sickly pea-green. "That swoop was too much for you—I'm sorry."

"Oh, no, senor," the man hastened to reply. "I enjoyed that—but—but should your honor ride me up in the air again, I will leave my tobacco at home. When we dive that way, I am thrilled—it is wonderful—But when the airplane buck so sudden—I—I swallowed my chew."

Bill hastily turned his head, his shoulders heaving with suppressed mirth.

"You'll be all right presently," he cheered when he was able to speak. "Tobacco won't kill you."

"To die this minute would be a joy," moaned the afflicted one. "It is being *unable* to die that is so unpleasant, senor!"

Billy could find no answer to this, so turned his

full attention to the guiding of Old Trail Eater.

Soon Marques spoke again, but this time in a more cheerful tone.

"If you turn from the river, to the left, now, we shall see the lake almost directly—going at this great speed."

For answer Billy banked and within a couple of minutes the broad bosom of Lake Innocence lay shimmering below them in the dazzling sunlight. Bill saw that it was a considerable body of water, ten or twelve miles long by possibly two miles wide.

"Any particular spot you want to land?" he asked his passenger.

Marques pointed ahead. "At the further end, if you please, for Joao is tapping trees in the forest to the southwest."

Down the lake they sped until Billy closed his throttle. Simultaneously, he pushed his stick forward, putting Old Trail Eater into a normal glide. At thirty feet above the water, Marques, who was watching intently, saw him begin a slow backward motion of the stick.

"That's called breaking the glide," he explained to the interested foreman—"now we're beginning to lose speed. As I pull this stick back, her nose

comes gradually up until now that we've reached level flight again, the bottom of the hull is only a couple of feet above the water.—Now I pull back the stick a little farther to raise her nose and depress her tail. We are approaching the stall—that is when we lose the speed necessary to support us in the air. Now we are stalling—my stick goes all the way back—and—we're riding on the water. Not such a bad landing, at that!" he added by way of conclusion.

"It is marvelous, senor. But much more complicated than one might think. I see now that every little thing must be done just so—"

"You said a mouthful that time, Marques. It is either 'just so'—or a funeral. By the way, you seem to feel better now."

"I do, senor. My chew of tobacco went over the side a way back. I am empty—but oh, much happier!"

"Atta boy!" chuckled Billy in English. Then turning to Spanish again, he asked the man where he wanted to go ashore.

"I'll take the little boat and paddle over to the beach, with your honor's permission," Marques answered, carefully taking off his headgear.

"No—I'll drive you over there myself."

Within a few minutes he had taxied the plane across the intervening water and Old Trail Eater was nosing the sand.

Springing overboard, Marques carried her anchor up the beach, where he buried it at the full length of its rope.

"Will the Senor come with me?" he queried, walking back to the plane. "He should put on high boots like mine before entering the forest. Snakes and other poisonous pests make walking dangerous in low shoes. The Senor should also go armed."

"I want to look over the engine, so I won't go with you, Marques," returned Billy. "If I stroll in the forest later, I'll bear in mind what you say."

"Better not go alone, senor. One unfamiliar with the jungle becomes easily lost—"

"Oh, I'll be all right. I have my wrist-compass—I'm used to navigating. When will you be back?"

Marques shrugged. "Who knows?" he said. "An hour—two hours—perhaps three. The trees Joao is working are scattered. It may take some time to find him. Well—with your honor's permission I'll be pushing along. Adios, senor!"

"Adios!"

The foreman passed out of sight among the trees. For the next quarter of an hour Billy busied himself tinkering with the engine. She had spluttered a bit on the way over and he wanted to rectify the trouble if possible before starting back to the plantation.

After a rigid inspection of the carburetor, and finding nothing wrong, he finally located a loose gas connection. He tightened it and then going into the cabin, he discarded the rubber-soled sneakers he wore, and laced on a heavy pair of boats that reached nearly to his knees. He then took a Winchester repeating rifle from the arms rack, saw that it was loaded and slung it over his shoulder. Next he filled and buckled on a cartridge belt and, locking the cabin door after him, sprang overside to the beach.

For a short time, he stood staring out over the stretch of water. So far as he could see, except for this small beach, the lake was banked high with a living mass of jungle green and the glorious blooms of thousands of flowering vines almost screened the trees.

There was a ripple on the lake's surface a few feet off shore. Out of the water appeared a long snout and head, on either side of which glared

two large eyes. As the alligator reached the shallows, he stopped swimming and raising himself on short legs, waddled out of the water and up the beach to rest on the hot sand not ten yards from where Billy was standing. Then the huge saurian's eyes closed and he proceeded to take a nap.

"The nerve of the brute!" Unslinging his rifle, Bill drew a bead on the reptile's eyesocket.

"Crash!" The detonation sent hundreds of birds fluttering into the air above the treetops. With a speed almost unbelievable in so gross a body, the alligator slashed around and seemed to fairly leap toward the water. In another instant he dove out of sight. The tracks on the sand, a slight ripple on the lake's surface where he had vanished, were the only signs to show he had ever existed.

"Missed, by golly!" Shouldering his gun in disgust, Billy headed for the forest.

Within its welcome shade he picked up the overgrown trail down which Marques had disappeared, and ambled further into the green depths. Solid and apparently impenetrable walls of vegetation lined the narrow winding path on either side. Through the pervading gloom, Bill

made out giant palms and ferns, shrubs, trees and flowering plants and vines without number, whose names he could not begin to guess.

At times he stopped and stared at a fig-tree completely overgrown with orchids, perhaps, or at the rain-bow plumage of some startled jungle bird.

Nor was this forest quiet—far from it. The whole place was aroar with the howls of monkeys, the raucous cries and chattering of its feathered inhabitants, distant shrieks from unknown beasts that fought and died within the jungle depths. Occasionally, the deep bass of some larger animal would come to his ears.

"Beautiful and interesting—" was Billy's summing up, "but not in the least cheerful. . . ."

He had just about decided to turn and retrace his steps toward Lake Innocence, when a pitiful sight met his eyes. At the opening of a narrow glade, roofed like the nave of a cathedral with intertwining vines and branches, sat a small monkey. The little fellow was evidently in agony, rocking back and forth, nursing one of his legs and moaning like a human.

Bill's compassion was aroused and he moved toward the sufferer. But as he came near, the

monkey crawled away, down the glade, running on his hands and one leg, with his broken leg trailing.

Billy wanted to catch the little fellow and carry him back to the plane and set his leg, so he increased his pace.

So did the monkey.

Billy began to run, but the going was rough and in spite of his spurt in speed, the monkey kept just beyond his reach. Suddenly, Billy tripped over a root and went sprawling. His head struck the edge of a rock and for some time he lay there, unconscious.

Presently, he came to, and though he was dizzy, he managed to sit up and look about him.

The monkey had disappeared. Glancing at his watch, he was surprised to see that the hands marked four o'clock. It had been half-past two when he left the plane. Could he have lain here for one and a half hours?

Although Billy had a splitting headache, he got to his feet and started back. Then he stopped short. There were two glades, one crossing the other diagonally. Four ways to choose from. Was he headed back toward the trail or away from it? In the twilight of the jungle one glade seemed

much like another. His mind had been on the monkey and nothing else, when he had come down. For a long moment he stood there, gathering his scattered wits.

"That trail led southwest from the lake—" he muttered to himself. "I turned to the right from the trail to follow that little beast, or approximately northwest. Now to get back to the trail, I must take the glade heading southeast. That's simple enough."

He looked at his wrist-compass. The glass was shattered and the needle missing. A glance overhead showed him only too plainly that the massed foliage defeated all chances for a sight of the sun to guide by. What was more, only by climbing to the very topmost branches of the tallest tree could he gain a sight of it; and several futile attempts proved this an impossible feat.

After an hour of climbing up slippery trunks and crawling out on branches at the risk of broken bones, only to be blocked again and again by the interwoven network of vines and parasites which covered them, he gave it up and came down to earth once more.

"Confound my stupidity!" muttered Billy angrily—"I'm lost!"

CHAPTER VII

JUNGLE

THE first realization of his predicament was disheartening. But Billy's adventures on his father's expeditions in various parts of the world during the past two years had inured him to danger. Ever optimistic, he soon regained his courage and seating himself on a fallen tree trunk, began to plan his next move.

Certainly Marques and Joao had returned to the plane long before this. He knew they would attempt to track him, but of their ability to find him in the twilight of the jungle, he was not so sanguine. Even now he could not be more than a mile or two from the lake. But in which direction? The best thing he could do was to remain just where he was. It would probably mean spending the night in the forest, but that should be no great hardship to a fellow with his training. Had he not better prepare for it while there was still light to see? Anything was better than inaction. So Bill's thoughts ran on.

After firing four shots in the hope of attract-

ing the attention of his searchers, he set about collecting dead wood for a fire. Later, he was to regret those shots—though, at the time, it seemed the wise thing to do.

Presently he had a fire blazing and a store of fairly dry wood to keep it going throughout the night. By that time he realized that he was hungry—and thirsty. Food and drink were the next items on the program. It was then he appreciated the foolishness of firing those shots. The unaccustomed sound of their detonations had frightened off any birds or small animals that might have been in the neighborhood, and now the dense walls of vegetation seemed devoid of life.

He had built his fire at the intersection of the glades. A further search down the darkening isles, always keeping the fire in sight, revealed the dire fact that he would go supperless that night.

Then, by luck, he spied a swampy hollow. As he approached, he saw the ugly heads of *jararaca* snakes pop up through the thick scum of the pool. Although Billy knew their bite to be deadly, he was in no condition to be finicky. Slashing the pool with a broken branch, he filled his hat with the stagnant water and drank. It was sour and brackish, but it quenched his overpowering thirst, and

he resolutely put from his thoughts hidden dangers it might contain.

Night had fallen, black and opaque, by the time he got back to his fire. Bill was hungry after a long day without food. He was weak and tired and his head still ached abominably The close damp and heat of the jungle became overpowering. And to make matters worse, with sundown had come myriads of blood-sucking mosquitoes. Sleep was impossible. Only by smudging his fire and fairly scorching himself at its side could he gain any peace from these pests.

As he crouched there in the half-light of the flames, a handkerchief muffling his face all but the eyes, sweat running from every pore, the forest about him hummed with weird noises, melancholy and terrifying. And as an accompaniment to the general theme, from the tree-tops, little spider-monkeys whispered mournfully as the long hours dragged on.

Now and then he would hear the movements of heavy bodies crashing in the underbrush. Several times the red glare of hostile eyes shone from out of the darkness. These animals, whatever they were, came no nearer, for they were suspicious of the fire. But what bothered Billy most was the

knowledge that snakes seek heat—and might be drawn close by the warmth of the embers. He must keep awake now.

Shortly after midnight, he was startled from a fitful doze by a cry that raised the hair from his scalp. Somewhere in the forest, near at hand, a human being in dire distress was calling piteously for help.

Clutching his rifle and springing to his feet, Bill listened with bated breath, every nerve a-tingle.

There it was again. Nearer, this time. Four distinct notes—a pause—then four more notes in a despairing minor key. After a short interval, the last two harrowing notes came to him again. The agonized sobs of an Indian girl, perhaps, sending out her tribal signal for help, in a last desperate effort.

There came a rustling of the branches to his left, two gleaming eyes shone down on him and again the hair-raising cry was repeated.

"Bang!"

This time Billy's shot told. At his feet dropped a huge bird, stone dead.

" 'A mae de lua' (Mother-of-the-Moon!)"—he exclaimed. "I ought to have known what it was.

But who on earth would believe an owl could make such horrible noises!"

He turned to the fire, replenished it and sat down at the edge of the glowing embers. After a while he dozed once more.

It was well toward nine o'clock the next morning, when Billy awoke from fitful dreams. Not until a thin shaft of sunlight filtered through a rift in the heavy green canopy and struck his face, did he open his eyes, after the night's exhaustion.

With difficulty he got to his feet, supporting himself with his rifle. Fever sapped the little energy he had left. That filthy water he had drunk in the night—in a mood of hopeless despair he chewed the heart-leaves from a young palm. Water—clean, fresh water—he must have it. The lake—Lake Innocence—he must get back there at once.

If he had not been in the throes of jungle fever, he would have remained where he was. But the effects of the fever had already reduced him to a pitiful state, and desperation drove him on.

No longer did the jungle seem beautiful or wonderful, but horrible—a place of terror and death.

Up to now Bill had feared this green wilder-

ness no more than he feared any forest, but soon the dread of the lost commenced to take hold of him. Although he did not know it, each step he took led him further away from the trail, the lake, and safety. Stumbling on through the twilight, he threw furtive glances over his shoulder. In the semi-delirium of his sickness, he seemed to feel a great danger creeping closer and closer—the danger of starvation in the wild. The forest was something from which he fled. It was hideous, a trap, with its relentless walls of vegetation, its dark shadows, and moist, treacherous ground.

Starving, weak, oppressed by the thought of death, but lashed on by the urge to live, Bill headed further and further into the world of the unknown. He tramped on during the whole day, resting frequently, but whipped forward again by the very hopelessness of his plight.

That night he managed to build a fire, but ants and mosquitoes kept sleep away. Half stupefied, his delirium mercifully left him insensible to the full danger and his future prospects.

With daylight, Bill was able to rouse himself from his collapse. He could not walk, but crawled on all fours through the brush, dragging his rifle after him. He no longer had any object in mind—

just kept moving—just crept on like a sick, worthless dog.

One incident of that terrible day imprinted itself definitely on his understanding. Later in the afternoon his senses returned for a while and he realized where he was and how he got there. He was crawling through a thicket, making miserable progress, his hands torn and scratched by spines, when through a parting of the bushes, he saw a small clearing in a hollow just ahead. A fire smoldered there, and beside it knelt an Indian.

The sight of a fellow creature in this awful wilderness steadied Bill's nerves. Making no sound, hardly daring to breathe, he lay there watching.

The Indian was young and an unusually fine specimen of savage—well built, beautifully proportioned, with a flawless skin like polished bronze. His clothing was limited to a woven bark girdle and a feather head-dress not unlike that worn by certain tribes of North American Indians. At his side lay arrows and a blow-gun. Beyond the fire, lay the dead body of a tapir.

It dawned on Billy that the Indian had not moved for several minutes. He sat immobile, so still that Bill began to believe that he was asleep

or under a spell. The bronze face was in profile, and as Bill watched him closely, he saw that the Indian was staring steadily at the brush on the other side of the fire. Bill turned his own eyes in that direction and an indescribable fear seized him.

For a moment he too was held spellbound, unable to crawl a step further or even to think or act on his own initiative.

On a soft, muddy piece of ground, half hidden by dead branches, he beheld a somewhat cone-shaped mass, about seven feet in height. From the base of this cone came the neck and head of a snake, pressed flat to the ground, beady eyes staring malevolently at the Indian. It was coiled, forming an enormous spiral of scaly monstrosity.

Bill knew that he was now facing a beast few men had ever seen. This huge monster, which must measure between fifty and sixty feet in length, was the silent master of the swamps and rivers—a South American boa-constrictor. These horrible creatures always try to mesmerize their victims before crushing them to death. The Indian had fallen under its spell.

With an effort, Billy closed his eyes and pulled his rifle forward, inch by inch; he had his finger

on the trigger. Then, opening his eyes quickly, he fired point-blank at the dreadful head.

Instantly upon the shot, the Indian awoke from his trance. Catching up his blow-gun, he sent arrow after arrow tipped with death-dealing poison into the huge head, which by this time was raised to a great height above them, loudly hissing in agony.

The snake uncoiled itself and writhing with pain made for the edge of the clearing. The Indian followed at a careful distance from the struggling reptile, for the powerful lashing of its tail could easily have killed him with one blow.

Billy struggled to his feet and tottered toward the fire. His clothing was almost torn from his body by this last day's journey through the jungle. He was smeared with mud. His hands and face were lacerated, his knees a mass of bruises.

"Water!—water!" he called and fell forward on his face.

CHAPTER VIII

CANNIBALS

BILLY was partially awakened from his stupor —someone was pouring drops of sweet water down his aching throat. He opened his eyes. It was the Indian lad who knelt beside him. Standing nearby, peering down at him in wonder, were two other Indians, older men. With a sigh of content, Bill closed his eyes again and went to sleep.

Some days later, it seemed to Bill, he came out of fever-racked slumber to open his eyes upon a hazy vision of a broad, brown back. The man's muscles moved in rhythmic ripples. Bill saw that over the man's shoulders a thick pole passed horizontally over his own head. Then he realized that a hammock swung from the pole, and that, strangest of all, he, Bill, lay in the hammock!

He was being carried somewhere.

These Indians were cannibals, of course. He remembered that warning of Colonel da Silva's now. Was he to be another victim?—But what did it matter?—Again his eyes closed and he sank into oblivion.

Later, Billy had a vague recollection of hearing dogs bark. Then to his confused mind it seemed that he saw many men and women and children, clustered about him. They were moving toward a large, round house. Across an open space he saw parrots flying, brilliant streaks of color, and heard their shrill screaming. A curly-haired dog jumped up and commenced licking his face—then he knew no more.

When he came to he was lying in a comfortable hammock in a darkened room. He heard the murmur of voices and the young Indian whose face Bill remembered, came over and looked down at him. Bill did not understand where he was, for the moment, but thought that he had finally gone mad. With the Indian still looking down at him, he fell asleep.

The next time he woke up an old woman was bending over him, holding a gourd containing some broth. Bill swallowed this slowly, not feeling the craving of hunger, not knowing whether he was dead or alive. The old woman's face was expressionless as he gazed up at her, and noticed a peculiarly shaped piece of wood fastened through her lip. She looked unreal to the sick lad. He soon dozed off again.

On the fifth day, so Billy learned later, he began to feel his senses return. The fever commenced to abate and he was able to grasp the fact that he had been carried into the *maloca,* or communal village of a savage tribe—probably the Mangeroma.

Presently the Indian youth appeared again. He smiled as he bent over Billy and spoke several words in a tongue incomprehensible to the white lad.

"How!" said Billy, giving him the only North American Indian word he knew.

For a moment the young Indian looked perplexed. Then his smile broadened. "How!" he answered—"How!"

"Good for you, old sport," returned the sick lad in his weak voice. Then he pointed to himself and said—"Bill."

"Bill!" echoed the Indian knowingly. Then he stood up and waved his hand in a wide sweeping gesture. "Mangeroma—" he voiced in low, musical tones. His hand now pointed upward, then lightly touched his superb head-dress, and next, his chest. "Rere!" he said and followed with words Billy could not catch.

"I get you," he declared. "Your name is Rere

—you are Chief of the Mangeromas." The two gripped hands in a grasp of good fellowship and friendly understanding.

During the next week, the young Chief visited Billy every day. By that time the fever had left him, and though weak as a kitten, he began to take a real interest in his new environment.

When his head was clear and strong enough, he began to look around. The big room in which his hammock was swung, he found to be a colossal house, about forty feet high by one hundred and fifty feet in diameter. It was thatched with palm leaves and the sides formed of the stems of the *pachiuba* tree. This was the communal residence of the entire tribe, consisting, as Billy learned later, of two hundred and fifty-six souls. A single door and a circular opening in the roof were the only apertures in this enormous structure. The door was low, not more than four feet from the floor, so that it was necessary to creep on one's hands and knees to enter. This opening was closed at night by a sliding panel which fitted so snugly that Billy never noticed any mosquitoes in the cool, dark room.

Soon he felt stronger, and managed to get out of his hammock though he could not stand or

walk alone. With the aid of the two women who had been serving him, he stumbled across to where the young chief sat at ease in his hammock.

Rere flashed a pleasant, good-natured smile, displaying his white, sharply filed teeth. He waved his hand toward a hammock opposite and Bill was glad to sink into it. This was the beginning of many chats with the young Chief, who took a particular interest in his white guest's welfare.

As his health improved, Billy frequently spent his forenoons on a tree trunk outside the *maloca* with Rere. For hours they would sit and talk, the Chief sometimes pointing to an object and giving its Indian name, Bill repeating it after him until he got the pronunciation. By listening to the men and women day after day, Bill began to understand their primitive language.

As time went on, Bill thought a great deal on what he had heard of the Mangeromas—that they were cannibals—and their reputation for general frightfulness in this part of the Amazon was anything but flattering. But for all that Bill found them a friendly, courteous people. They were always ready to help him, and never laughed at his mistakes; always patient and kind to the foreigner in their midst. A people that might be

an example toward some of their more civilized brothers of the north.

Many of their customs were strange to Bill, and interested him greatly. Every man had two feathers inserted in the cartilage of his nose. At a distance, it appeared as if they wore moustaches. Rere, the Chief, in addition, wore a sort of feather-dress, reaching half-way to his knees. The women were adorned with an oval piece of wood piercing the lower lip, and painted fanciful designs in red and black on body, arms and face. Billy decided that like many girls he knew at home, these Mangeroma flappers might have been pretty if they had done away with their paint and ornaments.

He found that there were about sixty-four families living in the communal house. The poles which supported the roof formed the only distinguishing mark of the households. The men strung their hammocks between the poles in such a way as to form a triangle. In the center of this triangle a fire was always going. Here the women cooked the game that the men brought in at all times of day. The men slept in the hammocks, while the women and their children rested on the ground beneath. Woven mats of colored grass-fibres, skins

of the jaguar and of the three-toed sloth formed their beds and chairs. The men, when not hunting, spent most of their time in the hammocks. Here they repaired their bows and arrows, hollowed out blow-guns or fitted arrow heads to shafts.

Billy gradually not only picked up their simple language, but learned many surprising things about the Mangeromas. Certain of their foods were delicious, others equally nauseating, but he grew to understand that to refuse a dish was to offer insult. The families ate their meals round their fires in the communal house, each group squatting on the floor in their particular triangle.

Rere was not yet married, but had his meals cooked and served by women whose special duty it was to look after his needs. His power over the members of his tribe was absolute, and except when on a hunting expedition or in time of war, the barrier raised by his social prestige kept him much alone.

"To be born a great chief is to live a lonely life," he said, one day, to Billy. "My white brother who saved my life must also be great in his own country?—After this, we will share our meals together."

Billy was only too pleased with this arrange-

ment, and soon they went inside to partake of the midday meal. They were served with some very tender fried fish which Bill found delicious. Then there followed, broiled parrots, with fried bananas, which were equally as good. After this, he was handed a gourd full of broth. The odor was disagreeable enough, to Bill, but the first mouthful almost choked him. The meat which was one of the ingredients tasted as if it had been kept for weeks, and the herbs which it contained were so bitter and gave off such a rank odor that Billy's mouth puckered and the muscles of his throat refused to swallow.

Rere looked at him and frowned. "My white brother does not like the food of my fire?"

"Oh, yes, he does." Billy replied hastily. "The taste is new to me, though. We make nothing so good in my country." He closed his eyes and gulped down the soup. He had the greatest respect for the impulsive nature of this son of the forest, his host. Easily insulted, Billy knew that Rere, like his fellows, was well nigh implacable. Friends of one moment might quickly become vindictive foes of the next. Upon such slender threads ofttimes a life can hang!

The men were good hunters, experts in the use

of bow and arrow and their deadly blow-guns. They never failed to bring home a fresh supply of game for the village. This supply was always divided equally, so that no one should receive more than he needed for the day.

Billy was allowed now to walk about as he chose, and one day he asked Rere if he might go on a hunt. He was feeling almost like himself again, but realized that to grow strong, he must have exercise.

Pleased that his guest was taking an interest in the life of the Mangeromas, the Chief called over two young men of the tribe to accompany him. The Indians carried bows and arrows, and Bill his rifle, although he had no intention of using it, but wished to keep it for an emergency.

The trio had gone scarcely a mile when they came to a creek. On the opposite side, about a hundred and fifty yards away, a wild hog rooted for food. The hunters remained under cover of the brush, and stealthily watched the hog. Then almost simultaneously, the two Indians fitted arrows to their bow-strings. But instead of shooting point-blank and manipulating the bows with their hands and arms, they placed their great and second toes over the cords on the ground. Then with

their left arms, they gave the proper tension and inclination to the bows, which were at least eight feet long.

With a whirr the poisoned arrows shot forth and, while the cords twanged, sailed gracefully through the air, described a hyperbola and plunged into the animal, one on either side of his neck, just a little back of the base of the brain.

The hog dropped in his tracks and the three sprang into a canoe tied to the bank, and paddled across the creek.

All the way home, the hunters disputed as to the ownership of the hog. From time to time they would drop the beast which they had slung on a heavy pole, to gesticulate and argue. Billy thought they would soon come to blows.

"The white chief will tell this silly fellow that the hog is mine—" declared the taller man, appealing to Bill.

Billy shook his head. He had no mind to be drawn into the argument.

"I am sorry. Your arrows traveled so fast it was impossible to see which stuck the pig first. My suggestion is that you put the matter up to Chief Rere."

The word of the Chief, he knew, was law. No

one dared appeal from the decision of this youth. In fact, there would have been no one to appeal to, for the natives believed him invested with a mysterious power which made him the Ruler of Men.

"Good!" grunted both hunters. "We will take the hog to the Great Chief."

When they arrived at the village, they sent a messenger to Rere in the communal house, then waited outside with their kill.

Their emissary returned to say that the Great Chief would judge the case, and ordered the hunting party to enter the *maloca*. With some difficulty the hog was dragged through the low entrance, and all the inhabitants followed.

Rere was decked out in a new and splendid feathered dress. He was sitting in his hammock, made of finely braided multi-colored grass fibers, fringed with squirrel tails. The whole scene impressed Billy as being fantastic and extremely picturesque, the reddening light from the fires adding mystic color to the picture.

Across the fire from the Chief, lay the body of the hog. At each end of the carcass stood the hunters, straight as saplings, gazing directly before them. In a semi-circle, facing Rere and

surrounding the disputants, the tribe squatted on the ground.

Rere motioned Bill to be seated on the ground by his hammock.

"Go ahead with your story," he ordered, and one after the other, the hunters told their tale.

"Is all this true?" he demanded of Bill when they had finished speaking.

"It is true, mighty Chief," he answered solemnly, wondering how Rere proposed to solve this problem.

For a considerable time, the young Chief regarded the crowd of men, women and children with a steady, unblinking expression. He uttered no word, but there was a trace of a smile around the corners of his mouth which lent a becoming satire to his features.

Finally, he spoke.

"The hog is mine.—Go."

With this wise decree, the young man ended the matter. There was no grumbling or re-appeal to the great authority. His word was law.

CHAPTER IX

ENEMIES

EARLY the following afternoon, Bill was seated in the shade of a banana tree, talking with Rere, while most of the Mangeroma men were hunting in the nearby forests. Their conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of two of the tribesmen.

The young hunters were almost breathless as they halted before their Chief and proceeded to pour forth a torrent of words that brought Rere to his feet with a bound. The men talked so fast that Billy was unable to understand a word of what they said. But their excited gesticulations and the frown on Rere's face as he listened, told him that something serious was brewing.

Rere issued a sharp order and the tribesmen disappeared into the *maloca*. Then he turned to Billy.

"My white friend understands that we have had bad news? By the great river, many days' journey from here, there are good white men who never bother us. There are also bad men. In most

cases they are only partly white, sons of Indian mothers who have been stolen from the forest tribes. Some of these bad men are coming now, with guns to kill us, and to steal our women and children."

"I also have a gun—" declared Bill. "You may count on me."

Rere smiled and patted Bill's shoulder. "Thank you, brother. I expected no less. These men mean to destroy us—but Mangeromas are not cowards —we must prepare for them."

"When do you expect these marauders, Chief?"

"Not before another sun brightens the sky."

"But surely your messengers could not have met these enemies in the forest, if they are still a fifteen-hour journey from this village?"

"No. My men have received a message sent by other tribes of the great Mangeroma nation. Now we shall send forth word to my hunters in the forest to return at once. There is much to be done."

The two men reappeared from the *maloca* dragging a canoe and a bundle wrapped in a jaguar skin. Rere untied the leather thongs and disclosed a number of sticks and wooden slabs. While one of the hunters held the canoe, he

fastened two upright forked sticks on each side near the middle. Next, about three feet astern of these he laid a cross-piece on the bottom of the craft. To this were attached two shorter forked sticks, thus forming two horizontal bars, parallel to each other. One was fastened only a few inches from the bottom of the boat, the other about a foot and a half above the gunwales.

Billy, who was watching these preparations with keen interest, then saw him suspend from these horizontal bars four slabs of caripari wood, of varying thicknesses, so that they hung lengthwise over the canoe at an angle of forty-five degrees. He noticed that each pair of slabs was perforated by a longitudinal slit and that they were joined firmly at their extremities by finely carved and richly painted end-pieces.

One of the men handed Rere a wooden mallet whose head was wrapped with a thick layer of caoutchouc, covered with tapir-skin. With this he struck the slabs, each section of which gave off a different note, much as a xylophone would sound. The four notes, do-re-mi-fa, were in scale, so that the operator of this strange telegraph could send any message he wished to a person who knew the

code. It merely meant striking different combinations of the four xylophonic notes:

Do . . . re . . . mi . . . fa. . . . Do . . . re . . . mi . . . fa. . . . Rere struck the notes in quick succession and repeated this several times.

"That will catch the attention of my men in the forest, and of another section of my tribe who live in the *maloca* far up the creek. They in turn will relay the messages, on and on, just as my two men received them."

"Why, it's a regular musical telegraph," Billy exclaimed. The excitement in the air, promising a fight in the near future, acted as a tonic after the long quiet convalescence he had gone through. He already felt quite himself again.

"I don't understand what you say," Rere replied—"it is the way we signal over great distances. Now, I must tell them what the trouble is, and to come quickly back to the *maloca.*"

Deftly he tapped out his messages, repeating each one several times over. The sound was powerful and resonant, ringing through the stillness of the forest and reëchoing musically. After each message, Rere explained to Billy its exact meaning.

"That is the last message. I have said: 'A

white man is coming with us. He seems to have a good heart and to be of good character."

Billy grinned appreciatively. "Why did you bother to say that?" he asked.

"Because, my white brother, we shall not wait for these bad men to come here. We are going to meet them in the forest. Other *malocas* of the Mangeromas may send warriors. They must know that you are a friend—otherwise, there might be some unpleasant occurrences."

In a short time, men came pouring into the village from all directions, anxiety darkening their faces. When they had all gathered, Rere made them a short speech. Then, exhibiting a generalship remarkable in so young a man, he quickly divided the whole population, men and women, into groups, and apportioned the work of preparation.

By far the greater number disappeared again into the jungle, but this time, instead of weapons, they carried picks and shovels of native design. Others set to work making arrows, both for the bows and for the long blow-guns which they could use with such deadly effect. Still others prepared quantities of the mysterious *wourahli* poison for which the Mangeromas are famous throughout

South America. This acts both quickly and painlessly and holds the peculiar property of permitting game killed by it to be eaten without any bad effect.

When on hunting excursions, the men always carried a small rubber pouch, containing a few drams of this poison. Billy had noticed that they were always extremely careful in handling it, or the arrows tipped with it. They explained to him that should it touch the slightest scratch, certain death would follow. As it was so powerful and so little of it was needed to tip an arrow, he wondered why such quantities of the fearful stuff should be brewed at one time.

"You're making enough *wourahli* to kill every living thing in South America," he said to Rere, as they watched the women boiling great pots of crushed roots and certain large black ants whose bite is not only painful, but absolutely dangerous to man.

"If you are speaking of a place—" returned the Chief innocently, "I have never heard of it—as for the *wourahli,* we shall need every drop. You will realize that later, when we make our tour of inspection together. But you are still weak, after your illness. Go and rest in your hammock.

I will call you. Tonight and tomorrow you will need all your strength."

Resting in the semi-twilight of the *maloca,* Bill's thoughts turned to the coming battle, and to other things. He had heard tales of these Peruvian half-breeds, or *caboclos,* as they were called. He had no hesitancy in fighting them to protect the women and children of the Mangeromas from being carried off to a life worse than slavery. The depredations of these itinerant rubber-hunters and desperadoes were a byword along the border; and a continual war, he knew, was waged between them and the better class of settlers in the Amazon region.

His father, he felt, must long have believed him dead. Should he survive the battle, he meant to propose to Rere his return to the rubber plantation. Mr. Smith, he was convinced, would not give up the hunt for Doctor Stanton, though what his plans would be, Billy had no way of telling. Rere, when questioned, had denied all knowledge of the explorer and his expedition. Perhaps the tribes in the hills farther west could supply the needed information. But first of all, the *caboclos* must be attended to—later, he would be guided by events.

After a time, a hand grasped his shoulder and he opened his eyes. The young Chief was bending over him.

"My white brother has slept—it is good," smiled Rere. "Now we shall go and see what my people have done in the forest."

Once in the jungle, they followed a winding trail for more than a mile. Then they came upon a band of warriors putting the finishing touches to a large pit. The men had dug a hole about nine feet deep by eight feet wide. Its walls were inclined, the widest part being at the bottom. When Billy and Rere arrived, the Indians were covering this trap with branches and dead leaves, so as to resemble the surrounding soil. Anyone who stepped on this would be engulfed, and the Mangeromas hidden close by would immediately put an end to their struggles with poisoned arrows.

Further on, in another direction, Rere stopped Billy with a hand on his arm. "That," he said, pointing to a bit of ground just ahead, "is what we call an *araya* trap. My warriors have set the trail with barbed bones of the stingray. The bones are tipped with *wourahli* and are concealed beneath those dead leaves. When the *caboclos* come

this way, severe wounds will be inflicted on their bare feet—death will follow shortly."

"You certainly know your stuff—and how!" exclaimed Bill in English, and then translated the compliments as best he might, into the Mangeroma tongue.

"We must protect ourselves and our families," Rere affirmed. "Come—there are other things we must see."

Presently, they found a third trap. Perhaps the most ingenious of the lot, thought Billy as the Chief explained the complicated apparatus.

"Over there—directed across this path which leads to the *maloca*—is a blow-gun," he announced. "Look closely and you can make it out. But be careful—the gun is loaded."

Billy stared in the direction indicated. "Yes—I see it now, Chief—how does it work?"

"My white brother knows that our blow-guns are supplied with a wide mouthpiece. They need but little air pressure to shoot an arrow at a considerable speed."

"Yes?"

"Well—at the 'breech' of the gun over there is a young sapling. It has been cut off a man's height from the ground. To this a broad strip of bark

has been tied. When the small tree stands upright, this piece of bark completely covers the mouthpiece."

"I get the idea—this thin climber attached to the top of the sapling and pulling it over, is fastened on its other end on the opposite side of the path. The *caboclo* comes along the trail—breaks the climber and the sapling flies upward, bringing the piece of bark slap against the mouthpiece of the blow-gun!"

"You see clearly. The slap of the bark-piece shoots forth the arrow—and that must hit anyone who breaks the climber. It is fastened, as you can see, across the trail directly in front of the mouth of the gun."

"And all the arrow has to do is to break the skin of the *caboclo,* I suppose."

"Yes, it is enough. He cannot walk but a short distance before the poison paralyzes his limbs. Death comes almost immediately."

"Ugh!" muttered Bill. "I thought the jungle was dangerous enough before—but this kind of thing gives me the creeps."

After another hour of tramping and inspection, the two found themselves back at the first trap again.

"We have come in a large circle," Rere told Billy. "Now that I am sure every glade or trail leading to the maloca is guarded, we'll go back there. Much must be done still, before we are ready to fight these *caboclos*."

Returning, their path led by the side of the creek that supplied the Mangeromas with drinking water. Also, the creek gave them an abundant supply of fish, a food that made its appearance at every meal. The natives took a bath at least twice a day, but always did so some distance down stream so that the water nearby would not be spoiled for drinking and culinary purposes. When thirsty, Bill was in the habit of stooping down at the water's edge to scoop the cool fluid up in his curved hands.

Just now he was hot and tired. The water looked cool and sweet. Dropping to his knees, his hands were within a couple of inches of the brink, when he felt a rough hand on his shoulder and Rere flung him backward to the turf.

"Why did you do that?" Billy scrambled angrily to his feet.

"Poison!" said the young Chief in a calm voice. "You will find water at the *maloca*. Wourahli has

been poured into every stream and pool hereabouts."

Billy turned pale. "Forgive me, Rere," he said, with outstretched hand. "I didn't know—"

The Chief grasped his fingers. "It is well," he smiled. "My white brother's friendship for Rere is so much the stronger. Come, now—there is still work to be done."

CHAPTER X

BATTLE WITH THE CABOCLOS

UPON their return to the *maloca* Bill and Rere found about two hundred warriors squatting on the ground in front of the low doorway.

"YOB—HEE—HEE!" they yelled, giving vent to the ear-splitting warcry of the Mangeromas. Springing to their feet as they recognized their Chief—"YOB—HEE—HEE!"

A fine looking Indian with a feather head-dress somewhat larger than the others stepped forward from the ranks.

"Hail, mighty Chief," he greeted, holding up his right hand, palm outward.

"Hail—and welcome, Arara!" said Rere, holding up his hand in acknowledgment.

"I have brought the young warriors as you ordered, mighty Chief," Arara continued. "They are painted for battle and their weapons are sharp."

"Good—you have done well." Rere beckoned to Billy.

"Arara," he said, "this is my white brother,

Bill—a great chief in his own land. He will fight with us against the caboclos. Arara, my white brother—is a subchief under me, of the Mangeromas whose *malocas* lie nearer the hills."

"Hail, Bill!" cried Arara, saluting him, then offering his hand—"Hail!"

"Hail, Arara!" repeated Bill, shaking hands. "I might say," he added in English, "that the gang's all here—so I'll give you another one—*Hail!*"

Arara looked pleased, and Rere signed them to follow him into the communal house.

Billy had long before discarded the remnants of his torn and faded clothing for Indian dress. Except for his knee-high, snake-proof boots which were still in good condition, he now wore a girdle about his waist fringed with *mutum* plumes, and the colored squirrel tails of a Mangeroma Chief. Although skimpy, this costume suited the hot, humid climate admirably.

Upon entering the communal house and crossing the large room to Rere's hammock at the far end, the young chief turned to him.

"Bill—my white brother—" he said with simple dignity, "You have chosen to risk your life in defense of my people. I hereby create you a Chief

of my Nation, under me, the Great Chief of the Mangeromas." He beckoned to one of his waiting-women and taking from her a superb headdress of bright colored feathers and egrets, placed it upon Bill's head.

"Thank you, Great Chief," said Billy solemnly. "I shall do my best to prove worthy of this honor." He then shook hands with Rere and Arara. The little ceremony was over and the three sat down to a hearty meal.

"We will now sleep," announced Rere, when they had finished. "Our women are taking care of the warriors outside. Go to your hammocks, Chiefs of the Mangeromas. You will be roused in plenty of time."

The hands of Billy's wristwatch pointed to an hour after midnight when Rere woke him. Except for the two Chiefs, the communal house seemed deserted. Hastily, he pulled on his boots, adjusted his gorgeous feather headdress and cartridge belt, and snatching up his rifle, followed the others into the open.

Here a truly barbaric and awe-inspiring sight greeted them. From the trees which encircled the open clearing before the *maloca,* scores of spluttering, resinous torches burned brightly and

cast a peculiar, reddish light over the strange scene. Drawn up in four divisions, facing the entrance, were the warriors, armed and painted for battle. On the left were the club-men, whose ugly weapons were studded with teeth of the black jaguar. Those next in line carried the deadly three-pronged spears of the Mangeromas. Each warrior carried two spears, whose poisoned points were protected by sheaths of woven grass. The third division consisted of the youngest men of the tribe, youths of sixteen and seventeen. Each of these was armed with a seven-foot bow, and each bore at his left side a quiver, containing a dozen big game arrows, fully five feet in length. These arrows, Billy knew, were not poisoned, but their shock-rendering powers were fully as fatal. The arrow-heads were all made of the bones of the stingray, in themselves formidable weapons.

The fourth and last group was composed of blow-gun men—the most effective and deadly of this imposing array. These were specially picked warriors, older men, chosen for their skill and experience.

Billy was particularly pleased and complimented when Rere halted before this division and assigned him to its leadership. Arara, who was a

big, husky fellow, took command of the club-men, while Rere himself led the two other divisions.

The Chief then gave the order for the bow-and-arrow men to start in single file, the other divisions to follow after in close succession.

The women and children of the *maloca* stood around in the background as the little army disappeared into the jungle. While they showed interest in the departure, little or no emotion was displayed. In their stolid way, these women exhibited bravery that was surprising to see. Wives submitted dry-eyed to their husbands' embrace, a few sweethearts exchanged kisses—that was all.

For the next hour, Billy and his men traveled the dark jungle on the heels of the first division, pushing their way as noiselessly as possible through the thick mass of creepers and lianas. At this point scouts were sent out to reconnoitre, while the army waited in silent anticipation.

The Chief called Billy and Arara to him. "We are now in a narrow valley," he told them. "The vegetation is not dense here; but for the darkness you could see the hills plainly. Our enemies are headed in this direction. They are certain to come up this valley." He turned to Billy. "Post your men part way up each hill in two lines. They must

cover this valley from the further end, toward which the enemy is marching, back for at least a third of its length. My bow-and-arrow warriors will support you farther up the valley. Open fire as soon as the caboclos get well into this territory. But they cannot arrive before daylight. Go now, Chief, and may good luck attend you."

Billy saluted and hurried off to his men. Calling them about him, he outlined their plan of campaign. Then he split the division in two. Retaining command of one group, he placed the other under Tare, an older and more experienced warrior than the rest.

"Take your men to the hill on the left, Tare," he ordered. "We will take our places on the opposite side. Place your warriors the length of a man apart—and let no one fire until you hear my whistle. Then—all fire at once and keep on firing at will. Is everything understood?"

"It is understood, Chief—we go now—and we will not miss. Farewell."

"Farewell, and good hunting."

The bands then separated. Tare disappeared with his men into the brush at the left, while Billy and his warriors pushed their way toward the hill on the opposite side of the valley.

After placing his men, Bill took up his own position at the head of the line. There was still an hour till sunrise. With feverish anticipation, Bill waited in the darkness. If the caboclos should arrive before daylight, Rere's plan was certain of failure. Without a chance to take aim, neither the blow-gun division nor the bow-and-arrow men could take effectual part in the fray. The Chief must then rely entirely on those warriors armed with clubs and spears, stationed on either side of the trail.

Notwithstanding Bill's fears, it was some little time after daybreak and a pale light filtered down on the valley when the Mangeroma scouts reported the near approach of the enemy.

After a pause that seemed an eternity, Billy heard them talking and shouting to each other as they followed this natural route between the hills, cutting their way with machetes where vegetation partly blocked the way.

Then as the column advanced, he could see them plainly. There were sixty or seventy of the ugliest, most vicious band of cut-throats Bill had ever set his eyes upon. On they came, without any pretense of order or formation, each man armed with rifle and machete, while most of them car-

ried ugly-looking knives stuck in their belts. Still shouting and yelling, they made no effort to cover their advance. Like most of the border riffraff they held all natives in supreme contempt.

Billy waited until the last of the swashbuckling crew was well within the valley. Then, placing the whistle to his lips, he blew a single, sharp blast, and his men charged.

Where on the trail there had sounded coarse laughter and ribald shouts, now curses and wild cries rent the air. As the column turned to face the poisoned darts of unseen foes, it was met with a double flight of heavy arrows that wounded where they did not kill outright.

In vain their leaders tried to rally some semblance of discipline into the wavering band. Their scattering shots, fired at random into the dense brush seemed to have no effect whatever upon their hidden antagonists. No answering cries followed their screams of pain and rage. This silent death that shot them down from hidden vantage-points was more than human flesh and nerve could stand. With one accord, those who were able, turned and ran for the mouth of this valley of unseen terrors.

But from the brush on either hand, painted

warriors sprang out, armed with clubs and spears, cutting off all retreat. Although the half-breeds fought and snarled like cornered rats, their spirit was gone.

Still other warriors swooped upon them; Billy, following with his men, turned his eyes away. The battle had ended in a massacre. No quarter was asked or given. Not a single caboclo escaped this just vengeance of the Mangeromas.

Within a short time it was over, and the men assembled before Rere for a roll-call. When it was found that Mangeromas' losses totaled but three killed and four wounded, a great shout of thanksgiving arose. The Chief spoke a few words of praise, then he and Bill set out to carry word of their victory to the *maloca.*

"My brother has a brave heart," said Rere, as they trudged along, side by side. "He has stood by the Mangeromas in their trouble. He has helped them gain a great victory."

Billy made a motion of dissent. "I did nothing at all but post my men, Rere. I didn't even fire my gun. There was no need. May I ask you a favor?"

"Anything I can do to serve you will be done for you—" Rere halted and spoke impressively. "But first let me say that I watched you during

the battle. In that storm of bullets you stood unprotected, directing the fire of your men. There is no fear in you—" Rere's dark eyes flashed—"my brother is a man. What is it you would have Rere do?"

Billy laid his hand on the Chief's arm. "I have grown fond of the Mangeromas. They have been good to me, and have brought me back to health. Yet I would go to my father, Rere, who surely mourns me as dead."

Rere took Bill's arm. "I must tell you something. Just before the battle, word came to me that a great canoe with wings, growling like a hundred wild cats, flew over the hills toward the setting sun. You have told me how you and your father flew to this land. Do you think it is he?"

"Why, it must be, Chief!" cried Billy in excitement. "My father is not an expert pilot, but he is a brave man. Undoubtedly he is looking for me!"

"Or, if he thinks you dead, he is hunting for the white man whom you came to find."

"That may be!"

"At least he is no longer with the rubber-workers. My maloca lies nearer to high hills, by many days' march, than toward the great river from

which you came. Tonight I feast with my people. Tomorrow at dawn you and I, brother, will start for the hills."

Billy was so surprised that he lapsed into his native tongue.

"You're a great old scout, Rere!" he cried, holding out his hand.

"I don't speak Portuguese, Bill," replied the young Chief, returning the grip. "But I think I know what you mean."

CHAPTER XI

HILLS OF THE SETTING SUN

BILLY did not attend the victory banquet in the communal house that night. As enemies, half-breed Peruvian desperadoes were one thing; as articles of diet—quite another. He swung his hammock from a branch in the compound or clearing, and went to bed, supperless. He was taking no chances. The noise of the merrymakers within the maloca was deafening, but Bill was too tired to heed it and fell asleep almost at once.

Rere was as good as his word. Shortly after daybreak he wakened Bill and the two slipped out of the sleeping camp, on their way to the hills. The young Chief, despite his mere two hours of rest, seemed not at all weary but bright and eager for the trail.

They halted at last, after an hour's tramp, beside the sparkling waters of a lake, to take a meal and rest.

"Hungry?" asked Rere.

"I could eat a whale, Chief. Sorry—but I couldn't go the supper last night."

The young Mangeroma smiled faintly. "I am quite as hungry as you, Bill," he affirmed. "I never have eaten human flesh. If a whale is a big fish, you will have your desire—and the fish we are going to breakfast on will give us a great sport in catching it, as well." He stooped and drew forth a light canoe from behind a fallen log.

"But we have no line—do you expect me to shoot it with my rifle?"

"No, no. But I shall shoot it. Get in the canoe and keep very quiet. I will do the paddling."

Keeping the little craft near the shore, Rere sent her ahead with powerful and almost silent strokes. Five minutes later, he laid the paddle in the bottom of the canoe and plucked an arrow from the quiver on his back.

Billy saw that the iron head, with its two barbs was fitted into a short piece of wood which was stuck into the hollow shaft of the arrow, and was attached to it by a short length of stout rope. Then there was a much longer line which Rere attached to the head itself, coiling the slack and laying it across a thwart.

"Look!" he whispered, standing erect in the bow and pointing into the water.

Billy stared with bated breath. Half a dozen yards away, feeding close to shore in shallow water, was the largest fresh water fish he had ever seen or hoped to see. It was fully eight feet long and swam leisurely, surrounded by a school of its young—little fellows, recently hatched, nine or ten inches long.

"What is it, Rere?" whispered Billy.

"*Pirarucu!*—Watch!"

Swiftly fitting his arrow to the bow-string, Rere sent it hurtling through the air and down—into the head of the great fish. There came a whirl of spray and the pirarucu leapt clear of the water and streaked for the middle of the lake, hauling the canoe after at whirlwind speed.

With a master hand, the young Chief played out the line. As the fish turned and darted toward them he gathered in the slack with a sleight-of-hand movement amazing to Bill.

"Take the paddle and turn the canoe," called Rere. "We must not let him upset us, Bill. We would never live to reach shore."

Bill swung the canoe and as the *pirarucu* darted past them in the clear water, he saw that the iron head of the arrow was now only fastened to the shaft by the cord. For the first time he realized

what a marvel of ingenuity was this contrivance which allows the shaft full play so that it will not break during the struggles of its victim. The *pirarucu* he knew to be the largest edible fish in the Amazon region, and that when full grown it attains a weight of two hundred and fifty pounds.

For over an hour the two in the canoe fought this monster. Then as the struggling fish grew tired, they managed to beach the canoe and to spring ashore with the line. Two Mangeromas stepped from behind the trees and immediately lent a hand.

"You see, I knew what we should have for breakfast, so I told them to follow." Rere nodded toward the newcomers. "What we can't eat, they will carry back to the maloca."

The big fish was being hauled through the shallow water near the shore when one of the Mangeromas shouted—*"Piranha! piranha!"*

Billy saw that the water about the big fish was aswirl with smaller ones—hundreds of them, attacking the big fellow with indescribable ferocity.

"Pull! pull!" shouted Rere, throwing his whole weight on the line. "Those devils will tear him to pieces!"

A moment later, the great fish was landed and

lay on the narrow beach, gasping its life out.

"Look!" cried one of the men, and catching up the paddle, stuck it in the water. There was a rush of the small fish. The man drew out the paddle and held it up for inspection. It was gashed in forty places by the teeth of the *piranhas*.

"Now you have seen why we should not have been able to swim ashore if the canoe capsized," Rere told Bill. "There is nothing in the water, on land or in the air so ferocious. Compared to the piranha, an alligator is a tame mouse. Walk into water infested by them and they will pull you down and devour you piecemeal in a few minutes."

"A sweet country you live in, Chief!"

"Ah—but not so bad when you can eat *pirarucu* steak for breakfast—" grinned Rere. "Come over to the fire—I smell it cooking."

Billy enjoyed that meal on the beach. He found that the fish, eaten with hot breadcakes, tasted delicious. When they had finished eating, the two men stuck a pole through the huge gills of the fish and disappeared with it in the direction of the maloca.

Rere and Billy paddled to the other end of the lake and there they came upon the mouth of a river which flowed out of the west. Making way

briskly against the swift current and stopping only long enough to shoot a couple of parrots for lunch, they kept on until an hour before sundown.

A turn in the stream brought them to a large open space on the right bank. Bill was surprised to see that about five hundred Indians had assembled before two round malocas, constructed like the one in Rere's village.

"Friends of yours, Chief?"

"Members of the Mangeroma nation—but of another tribe, Bill. Word was sent to them of our probable arrival this evening. They are much interested. Their eyes have never rested upon a white man before."

The villagers crowded forward as the canoe made its landing. Dogs barked, large scarlet araras screamed in the treetops and children hid behind their equally fearful mothers at their approach. The tribal Chief, a brawny fellow, decorated with squirrel tails and feathers of the mutum bird stood to the front, with arms folded on his chest. His handsome head was crowned with tailfeathers of the red and blue parrot.

The two Chiefs embraced each other and uttered their tribal greeting—"Hee-hee!" Billy was welcomed in the same cordial manner, and

passing through the excited gathering, the three entered the communal house of the Chief.

Once inside, women brought them bowls of water, and after a refreshing wash, they sat down to a meal that Bill thoroughly appreciated. He was weary from the day's experience and glad to rest in a hammock after his hunger was satisfied.

Rere opened the conversation, for Mangeroma etiquette prohibits talking at meals.

"Aaoo," he said to the Chief. "You know why we are here—and what my white brother is seeking. Has any word come to you from the hills?"

"During the last moon, Mighty Chief, one of my young men journeyed far toward the setting sun. When he returned, he told a strange tale. He is here now, for I thought you and the White Chief would wish to question him." Aaoo turned and beckoned. "Come hither, Wanderer!" he called.

A slender young man stepped from the shadows, gravely saluted and stood at attention. He gazed hard at Billy but spoke not a word.

"Greeting, Wanderer—" began Rere. "Tell us of your long journey in the hills."

"Two moons ago, while hunting the jaguar, Mighty Chief, I spent a night in the maloca of

those who hold the Western Door of our mighty nation. That maloca is four days' journey from here."

"Yes?" encouraged Rere. "And our Brothers of the Western Door gave you news that led you to travel further?"

"It is true, Mighty Chief. Although their hills are high, our brothers told me of far greater hills whose tops, they said, pierce the very clouds. We, the Blue Parrots and you, the Great Chief of Our Nation and holder of the Eastern Door, have heard of these great hills—but we have ever held the tale to be a myth—for how could anything be tall enough to reach the clouds?"

Rere nodded. "True, Wanderer—I have heard such a tale."

"But when I laughed, Mighty Chief, our Brothers grew angry. They said that if I was a man of honor I would not doubt, but would go and see for myself."

"And you went?"

"I went and I saw, Mighty Chief."

"How far do these hills lie from the Western Door?"

"One moon—two moons, perhaps. I traveled toward the setting sun for five days, blazing my

trail against return. On the sixth morning, I beheld these high hills—taller and nobler than anything I had imagined. Clouds swam about their heads, shining dazzling white like giant egrets in the sun—"

"Then you went no further?" interrupted Rere.

"No. I started on my journey back before the sun sank that day. I saw strange sights. I had had enough."

"Did you also see the great flying canoe of which we have heard?"

The Wanderer shook his head.

"Not I, Chief. Those who guard the Door saw it pass over their maloca, headed toward the setting sun."

"When was that?"

"During the crescent of the last moon."

"Why do you think all this is of interest to us?"

"Because the White Chief was there in the cave."

"White Chief? What White Chief?"

"He—of the red hair—who lies in the hammock yonder—" was Wanderer's startling reply.

"What's all this?" Bill was really interested now. He got out of his hammock and walked over

to the young warrior. "Where is this cave?"

"Above the stream on the height that overlooks the great hills, Lord Bill. My trail is blazed to the door."

"You say this man had red hair, like me?"

"Yes, Great Chief."

"He was alone?"

"Yes."

"Look at me closely.—You see now it was another?"

"Not so, Chief.—Except that you wore no feathers on your head—and you seemed ill—I saw you standing in the sunlight of the cave's mouth as plainly as I see you standing here!"

"While I," said Billy slowly, "was with Chief Rere in his maloca at that time. No one can be in two places at the same time, Wanderer."

"It is magic, Chief."

"Magic—nothing—but it is interesting enough to investigate. How about it, Rere?"

The young Chief's eyes sparkled.

"I'm with you, Bill," he affirmed. "We shall start in the morning for that cave."

CHAPTER XII

"REDHEAD"

"WELL, this trail's endless—judging by the blazes on the trees," said Billy as he lounged by the camp fire on the fourteenth morning of their journey into the western hills.

Rere, who had been squatting at his side, now stood up and stretched his arms above his head. A little brook gurgled over its rocky bed, nearby, in the dappled sunlight of the forest.

"The Wanderer traveled far," he yawned; and proceeded to put out the fire with water from the stream. "My White Brother has not fully recovered his strength—therefore, we have come slowly. Ugh! all this walking makes one weary. I, too, shall be glad when we reach the cave."

"The more I think about the red-headed man Wanderer saw, the sorrier I am he lost his nerve and started home without speaking to the man."

"But it is likely that the Red-headed One could not have understood Wanderer had he done so, Bill."

"True—but one thing we do know—the

stranger was not my father nor Mr. Stanton; neither has red hair and both are middle-aged."

"Could it not have been one of Stanton's men? The only survivor of his party, perhaps?"

"Must be—this country doesn't breed many red heads. Well, let's get along—I'm ready, if you are?"

"O-kay-e!" grinned the young Chief, using one of the American phrases Billy had taught him and of which he was very proud. "Let's go!"

During the last four days of their journey, both Bill and Rere began to realize that not only were the hills they crossed gradually becoming higher, but the altitude of the entire country was increasing. Although the forest vegetation was still dense and luxuriant, they remarked the absence of palms and the more tropical plants and trees. No longer did the jungle approximate a Turkish bath during the noonday hours. The young Chief was not used to a more temperate climate. The night before he had shivered miserably by the fire. Tonight bade fair to be even colder.

"Every time we top a rise, I feel sure we shall find the cave beyond, and get a sight of the mountains—and then—there is only a valley and another hill beyond it." Billy's voice showed his

weariness. "And what is more—if we don't find that cave on the other side of this hill—we'd better scout around for another one—or build ourselves some kind of a hut. These feathers we are wearing are all right in their place, but—"

"The top of a high hill on a cold night is *not* the place—" cut in Rere, with a chuckle. "Let us hope this hill will be the last."

For the next half hour they pushed up the steep incline.

"And it is!" gasped Bill, as they topped the rise, taking up the conversation where they had dropped it—"Look! Rere, look! There are the Andes!"

The view was magnificent. From where they stood they could see wave after wave of billowing green that swept out and up toward a rocky barrier of towering peaks capped with eternal snows.

"Pretty fine, isn't it, Rere?"

"It is marvelous, Bill. I have seen and heard so many strange and wonderful things of late. You, yourself, a white-skinned, red-haired man—to come upon you there in the jungle—marvelous! And then when we learned to talk with each other—"

"You thought me a marvelous liar, eh?"

"I was going to put it in a more polite form —but now I know that there are many white men such as you—that these men fly through the air in great bird-like canoes. And over there are the mountains Wanderer told us about. Perhaps I shall see one of those great villages you have pictured to me, with its thousands of stone malocas? . . ."

"A city up here in these foothills? I doubt it, Rere. But there is the cave we are looking for, or I'm a *caboclo!*"

"Yes, I have been watching it, Bill. If the man we seek is in there, he is very quiet. His hearth fire on that rocky outcropping before the entrance is cold. It looks to me as if he had left the place. Shall we go and find out?"

"Better let him know we are here. We don't want to surprise the lad and have him take pot shots at us.—Hello, there! You in the cave!" he shouted. "We are friends—*amigos!*"

For two or three minutes they waited. There was no sign of life from the cave.

"No use waiting longer," said Billy at last. "Come along. We'll take a look for ourselves."

At first glance the cave seemed empty—empty, that is, of its inhabitants—for inhabited it surely

had been. Though small, it was comfortably furnished. Two couches, covered with thick wool blankets were set against one wall. Across from them were three large wooden chests. A rustic table and a few chairs took up the center of the room, while along the back wall were roughly constructed shelves containing cooking utensils and food. A collection of agricultural tools, three rifles and other hunter's weapons leaned against the walls. The stone floor of the cave was covered with a thick rug which reminded Billy of the Navajo blankets of his own Southwest.

"I must say the fellow believed in being comfortable," he remarked, taking in the details. "But I wonder where he's keeping himself now?"

Rere took a quick step forward. "He is here—" he said, pointing within— "but look—there is something wrong!"

Stooping through the low entrance, he entered the cave, Billy at his heels.

Huddled on the rug on the far side of the table lay the body of a man.

"Redhead, all right!" exclaimed Billy in a whisper, as Rere dropped to his knees beside the figure. "What's the matter with him?"

"He is—dead."

"Killed, do you think?"

"There is no wound, so far as I can see. The body is cold, but he has not been dead long—not over three or four hours at most."

"Poor chap! He must have fallen from the chair, there, at his noonday meal." Billy shook his head and sighed; then bending closer to the still form, he said—"I'm not an authority—but it looks to me like a case of heart failure. What do you think, Rere?"

"Look at his face," said the young Chief quietly.

Billy got down on his knees at Rere's side. In the dim light of the cave he saw that the features beneath the red thatch were those of a young fellow of eighteen or nineteen. Even in death the face was handsome. It seemed to Billy oddly familiar.

"He looks enough like you to be your brother," Rere interrupted Bill's reflections. "No wonder Wanderer was startled when he saw you in the maloca. *Have* you a brother, Bill?"

"No, Rere. But I can see the resemblance. It's uncanny. Let's move him over to the couch. Then you and I'd better get busy with some of these tools, outside. He's got to be buried, you know."

It was nearly dark before they had finished their work of mercy. Above the grave they had piled a cairn of stones to mark the unknown lad's resting-place.

"Of course, you don't know what a Hollywood bathing beauty is, Rere."

Spades on shoulders, they were walking back to the cave. Billy, who felt anything but cheerful, was nevertheless endeavoring to appear so.

"Their dress is about as skimpy as ours, without the feathers—all of which is to tell you that I am not only tired—but confounded chilly!"

"If that means cold to the marrow—so am I!"

"Well, suppose you make the fire for supper, while I scout about for some clothes. At worst, I can make a couple of ponchos out of the blankets."

"Are they warm?" asked Rere, whose teeth were chattering.

"Fine and warm," assured Billy.

"Hopp to et, ki-ed!" The young Chief was very proud of his North American vocabulary. Then switching to the Mangeroma dialect—"You produce clothes and I will produce supper."

Night had fallen over the high hills, so Bill lit

the flat tallow candles that were on the table, and threw back the lid of one of the chests.

"Come over here, Rere—" he called a moment later. "Let the fire go for the present. This box is jammed with all kinds of clothes." He commenced pulling the garments out of the chest and piling them on the rug. "Here is an undershirt and a long paid of tights with feet—wool, I guess —like that poor fellow wore. He certainly had plenty of clothes!"

"How do I get into these?" Rere was struggling with the wearing apparel, which was another marvel to him.

"Wait till I get rid of these boots—and watch how I put on my things. Take off your girdle and slip into the pants, this way—the shirt goes on over your head. This is the first time you've worn clothes, I expect. How do they feel?"

"Warm, thank you—but not warm enough. Never would I have believed that night could be so cold!"

Billy passed him a knee-length woolen tunic and donned one himself.

"Pull that on over your head," he suggested and dove into the chest again.

"Redhead wore sandals, too," he announced.

"Here's a pair for you—and one for me—that's right. Lace them around your ankles like this. Warmer now?"

"Much warmer. Shall we open the other chest?"

"Go ahead." Bill tightened a sandal-lace and then went over to inspect this other find. "What, more clothes? That lad certainly had some outfit! Those things you've got in your hands, Rere, are cloaks. See? Throw one end over your shoulders, the other across your chest and over again."

"It is good to be warm once more," Rere said contentedly. "What are all these other things in the big box?"

Billy looked them over. "Cotton clothes for warm weather."

Rere looked surprised. "Why should a man wear what you call clothes—when it is not cold?" he asked naïvely.

Billy laughed. "Simply a custom, Chief. Both men and women wear them all the time in my country—and in many others, for that matter. If you or your Mangeroma women invaded one of the cities I have told you about, in your national lack of costume, you'd start a riot—you'd all get arrested."

Rere was puzzled. "But why, Bill? What do you mean?"

"I'll explain sometime when I'm not so hungry," Billy temporized. "Start the fire, Great Chief, while I raid those shelves and see what I can scare up for supper. This cave is stocked like a country store."

"Why do you use American words when you are talking Mangeroma, Bill?"

"Because there is no translation, I guess. But all this chatter is getting us nowhere; in plain Mangeroma it makes for an empty stomach. Understand?"

Rere laughed and went over to the woodpile.

That night, Bill slept comfortably for the first time in two weeks.

"And you say that these clothes are not like those worn by people in your country?"

Rere was still pondering the strange ways of northern civilization. They were seated at the breakfast table, although the meal was long over. The mystery of the cave and its late occupant was naturally the topic of conversation.

"They are quite different from any I've ever worn—or seen, Chief."

"Then the Redheaded One couldn't have belonged to Dr. Stanton's party?"

"No. Although he resembled me, I don't think he was a North American. It may be that the clothes altered his appearance, though. Unless I'd seen you putting them on, I'd never have known you dressed this way." Bill's eyes twinkled. "That blue and red cotton tunic you're wearing this morning makes you look like the King of Parrots, Chief."

"You're a gay-plumaged bird, yourself, Bill. Why *did* that fellow have all those clothes? Why is this cave stocked with a six months' supply of food?"

"And here's another—" reflected Billy. "When I first saw these clothes, I thought at once of the fabled white race who are supposed to live in this part of the world. But then—where did those rifles come from—and Redhead's wristwatch that you're wearing?"

"Perhaps he is one of those Chibchas you told me about?"

"But there have been no Chibchas for probably three hundred years—that is to say, thirty-six hundred moons."

"A long time. But maybe some are alive in

these mountains. You say that is your honored father's idea."

"Has there ever been a Mangeroma born with red hair, blue eyes and a white skin?"

"Never. And if a child were born like that, its mother would certainly kill it."

"And you couldn't blame her?" There was a twinkle in Bill's eyes as he watched his friend's face.

"No, you couldn't.—That is,—I—er. I'm sorry, Bill," he stammered, "but—"

"Forget it," laughed Billy. "Redhead was no Chibcha. They all have *lovely* brown skins, black or brown eyes and black hair like Mangeromas!"

"Then you think—?"

"I think—" began Bill, when his thoughts skidded to a stand-still. "Look, Rere! Look!" he cried, pointing down the hillside.

Rere swung around in his chair. "I see," he grunted. "There are more than fifty men in that group—and they are coming here. Get your rifle, Bill—I'll use my warbow first—and the blow-gun when they get nearer."

"Wait a moment—" Billy caught his arm. "It won't do any good to start something we can't finish.—Don't you see that those men are wearing clothes just like ours?"

CHAPTER XIII

ON TO THE RED CITY

STANDING just outside the entrance to the cave, Billy and Rere awaited the approach of the strangers.

As they came a little nearer, Rere started and turned to Bill. "They are *white* men—" he murmured in astonishment.

Billy nodded. "Yes—though most of them have black hair they seem to be no darker-skinned than Spaniards. Now, remember to follow my lead. It may mean the difference of life and death to us. If I can understand their language, I'll translate to you as we go along."

"O-kay-e," Rere acquiesced with a smile. "I will do as my white brother orders."

The party wound its way up the hillside. At its head walked two men, more handsomely dressed than their followers. Presently the company drew up in two long lines, facing the cave. The leaders stepped onto the rocky ledge before the entrance.

Then as Bill came a few paces forward, motioning Rere to remain where he was, the whole

party, leaders and men, dropped to their knees and bending forward, chanted in Spanish of peculiar inflection:

"Hail, Zipa! Hail, Zipa! Hail, Zipa!"

Billy spoke in a quick aside to the young Mangeroma chief.

"They're Chibchas—I'm sure of it. They take me for Redhead. He was evidently their King or Crown Prince—both have the title of Zipa.—You're my servant—remember!" Then aloud, he said:

"Rise, my friends! Where do you come from—and why do you interrupt my privacy?"

One of the leaders, an old man with a white beard and piercing black eyes made obeisance.

"I am Chua, High Priest under thy Mighty Uncle. We, the Lord Puna and I, have come from the Red City to escort you thither. Today, the six years of your novitiate are over. It is time now for the Tears-of-The-Sun festival. Is it your pleasure to come with us now, Great Zipa?"

"First let me ask—my Uncle is well?"

"His Majesty's health is failing. He longs for his nephew. The Zipa Tani is an old man and his cares are many."

"It is well that I go. I and my servant are ready."

Chua's brows drew together as he glanced past Bill at Rere. "What has become of my son, Lord? He who served you until six months ago, when he received the food and clothes from the carriers? Did my Lord find fault and kill him perchance?"

"Not so. He was taken ill and died a natural death." Bill began to realize that his pose as Zipa was going to be a strain on his imagination. "You have my sympathy, Chua."

The High Priest bowed. "Your Royal Highness is kind. Chua is grateful. Is this other man satisfactory?"

"Rere is devoted. I saved his life. I would like to have him always near me."

"My Lord's power, like that of his Glorious Uncle, is absolute. It shall be as he wishes."

The old priest turned toward the men and beckoned, whereat four of them stepped forward, bearing a palaquin on their shoulders. They brought this traveling couch to where Billy stood and set it on the ground at his feet. It was a splendid litter; the frame was entirely of wonderfully carved and chased gold; a dark green silk

canopy covered the cushioned interior and silk curtains offered privacy as the occupant desired.

Billy, inwardly mirthful but outwardly grave, got into the palaquin and sat down. The bearers lifted him to their shoulders. At a sign from the High Priest they moved off down the hillside. Presently the soldiers closed in and formed a cavalcade about the palaquin.

In the valley, the little company followed a rough trail leading into the southwest. Billy realized that unless he learned more of this new environment which he was being forced into, he would soon be unmasked. Accordingly he decided upon an immediate course of action.

"Come and walk beside me, my Lords Chua and Puna—" he called through the curtains.

These worthies had evidently posted themselves directly behind the litter, for they stepped forward immediately.

"The Mighty Zipa desires our presence?" Chua's voice was obsequious.

"Yes." Bill's reply was short. He could not but feel that the ingratiating subservience of this sharp-eyed old man was a bit overdone. The Lord Chua would bear watching, he decided.

"I want information, my Lords. When I was

brought from the Red City to the cave, there to undergo the ordeal of living in seclusion with but a servant for company, as our ancient custom prescribes, I was but a boy. Since then at stated intervals, clothes, food and weapons have been sent me—but no news. Six years is a long time—I have forgotten many things."

"That is not surprising," rejoined Puna. "The custom, I think, is barbarous. I would not undergo it for all the wealth of the temples."

Chua shot an angry glance at the speaker. "Lord Puna voices sacrilege—" he hissed, "and sacrilege is punishable by death in the pit!"

"Not so, Chua," returned Puna stoutly, although Bill saw that he paled at the High Priest's venomous words. "Granted the custom has been practiced for centuries and centuries: it does no good and simply means six years of hardship and imprisonment for the man who will one day rule the Chibchas by his divine right. Since we came to the Red City, we have progressed. We have become a civilized community, keeping to ourselves for our own protection, yet learning many good things from our neighbors. We have even cast aside the ancient Chibcha tongue, except for religious purposes in the temples."

"Why, that is one of the things that has worried me," remarked Billy thoughtfully. His liking for the young Lord Puna increased in proportion to his growing distrust of the High Priest.

"Does your Highness remember anything at all?" queried Chua, with a half-concealed sneer.

"Oh, yes. I remember that the Spaniards drove us out of our country far to the northwest, about three hundred years ago—but a boy of eleven or twelve takes little interest in history. Why is it that we should have taken the language of our conquerors, Chua?"

"The Lord Zipa has *remembered* correctly—" said the High Priest. "What he *forgets* is that the Chibcha nation fought until there were but a handful of men left for your mighty ancestor to lead. Although the Spaniards were few in numbers, our swords of stone and glass were of little avail against the weapons and armor of steel. The conquerors, always ruthless, were more than usually cruel and brutal. They slaughtered all who opposed them, massacred women and children without mercy.

"So, rather than become slaves of these murderers, the Zipas, Uncle and nephew, led their

meager remnant far up into the fastnesses of the great mountains."

"Was it there they built the Red City?"

"No, Lord Zipa. In the heights of the Andes, they outdistanced the enemy. But now they encountered the terrible cold and snow of the mountains. Their clothing was intended for a warmer clime. They starved and froze in insufficient shelter. The few women and children who had survived the massacre and had come with the men, died during the winter. In the spring it was decided to journey still further. By this time there were barely a hundred men left alive of our great Chibcha nation. But this little band traversed the mountains to the east and south, eventually to come to the spot where today their noble city stands."

"But how could these few build a great city with their bare hands?"

"Patience, Majesty," the High Priest spoke dryly. "I am about to tell you that. When they located the site upon which they proposed to build their new City, far from the haunts of men, they lacked practically everything. They had but these wherewith to make a state—indomitable courage and many sacks filled with emeralds and

other precious stones, from the treasury of the Empire. They had carried this treasure with them over the mountains. Some ten or twelve years prior to this, the Spaniards, under Pizarro, had conquered Peru. They colonized the land of the Incas with their own people, who voyaged from Spain in great vessels. It was then your ancestor showed his genius."

"What did he do?"

"A meeting was called and they decided to send certain of their men into Peruvian territory; some to buy tools and weapons and other necessities; others, to bring back Spanish women. For in order to rebuild a nation, they needed wives; and the Zipa decided they would mate with Spaniards and thereby build a new race worthy to meet these white conquerors on their own ground if necessary. Later, it was ruled that a certain percentage of our young men must marry full-blooded Spanish girls, so, as you may remember, they are continually being brought in for that purpose."

"And so we Chibchas who are really more than half Spanish now—have become white!"

"That is true, Lord Zipa."

"But with this continual importation of women,

why is it that our Red City is not overrun with females?"

"My Lord forgets that every year a certain number of our young women must enter the priesthood, to become Virgins of the Moon—and the Moonmaidens can never marry."

"Yes, yes, that is so—of course." Bill's manner implied that this detail had slipped from his mind, momentarily.

"My Lord wishes to hear more?"

"Certainly, Chua. I have forgotten so much of my country's history—it really appalls me when I begin to think how much I must learn!"

Puna spoke up eagerly, his features breaking into an engaging smile.

"Pardon, Lord, but it is written that other Zipas—your forefathers—have had the same trouble in remembering after their six-year ordeal. Be of good heart—it will soon come back to you, after a little prompting."

Billy thought it doubtful, as memory had nothing to do with his case. But he thanked Puna, and the High Priest continued his discourse.

"These Spanish women spoke no Chibcha, and found it a most difficult language to learn. Also, they naturally spoke Spanish to their children,

who grew up bi-lingual. So Spanish was spoken more and more, until, after two or three new generations had thrived in the Red City, our ancient language was relegated to the temples. Today it is used as our language of worship, much as the Spanish South Americans use Latin in their church services."

"And have we kept in touch with these outside peoples other than to marry their women?"

"We have, my Lord. For three hundred years, ours has been a secret civilization, cloistered in the Red City and those fertile valleys nearby. But had we simply gone on of ourselves, we never could have advanced. Each year, five of our most promising young men are sent by the State to other South American centers of learning and culture, there to study. After five years, they return, bringing with them the knowledge and achievement of our contemporaries. While they are away, they pass as Spanish Americans—which, of course, they are. In that way, we have obtained those modern inventions which our Zipas deem best for the people's welfare. After you undergo your ordination and become co-ruler with your Mighty Uncle, you will learn more of these things. The life of a Zipa is a busy one."

"I can see that. But tell me, Chua—have none of these young men breathed the secret of their hidden country?'

The High Priest motioned a decided negative. "Not one, my Lord."

"How is that?"

"The penalty is too severe!"

"But what is it?"

"Pardon, Highness. It is sacrilege to speak of such things. Suffice it that the soul is killed as well as the body.—But the sun is now high in the heavens and—"

"My empty stomach cries for food—" laughed Puna. "Will the Zipa stop and lunch?"

"The Zipa certainly will!" grinned Billy, and the cavalcade was brought to a halt.

For the next few days the party traveled on in the same southwesterly direction. But now Bill walked with the others. At night, tents were pitched to afford shelter from the cold which grew more intense as their altitude increased. Neither Bill nor Rere was uncomfortable, as Bill insisted that the young Mangeroma Chief share his tent. This also gave Bill a chance to keep him posted as to what he had learned during the day from Chua and Puna.

The High Priest grew more and more taciturn as they neared their destination. Puna, on the other hand, proved a talkative soul, once Billy had partially broken down the barrier of deference which was accorded his social position. Puna was a simple-hearted young fellow, ingenuous and likeable. As Billy learned to know him better he realized that Puna was to be trusted. Thereafter he did all he could to make a friend of the young Lord. Gradually, it became evident that Chua resented this growing intimacy, and Billy felt surer than ever that the High Priest was a person to be closely watched when once they entered the Red City.

All day long, during the fifth and last day of their journey they traveled up a narrow defile which wound through the mountains. Even when darkness overtook them and the piercing chill numbed their bodies, they kept doggedly on.

Billy knew that they must be in the very heart of the high Peruvian Andes, a part of the world quite as remote as the North Pole from all civilized habitations. He was extremely thankful when they reached the top of the pass and after another hour of tramping, camp was pitched and he was able to crawl between thick blankets in his tent.

At sunup next morning, the two Chibcha lords roused him. He quickly dressed and went outside. To his surprise, he now overlooked a high plateau, crisscrossed by narrow canyons, whose sandstone walls seemed blood red in striking contrast to the snow capped peaks which hemmed them in.

Far below, in these deep red rock fissures, he could make out tiny figures moving to and fro—but so far as he could see, there was no sign of a city. Yet Puna had told him that early this morning they would reach their destination.

Then he raised his eyes and saw that these red canyons all converged on a lake, almost circular in shape and probably half a mile in diameter. On the lake rested an airplane. Although it was some miles from where he stood, he could make her out clearly in the thin mountain air.

"Behold your capitol, Lord Zipa!" Puna was standing beside him. "Below lies the Red City."

But Billy did not answer. He was too excited to speak. He had recognized that airplane on the lake—it was Old Trail Eater.

CHAPTER XIV

EL DORADO!

BILLY was given no time to speculate upon the appearance of Old Trail Eater upon the Lake of the Red City.

The High Priest stood before him, and bowed even lower than usual. Bill stared at him, and decided that Chua's salaams to royalty did no more than camouflage his covert sneers.

"Highness—" he said in his pompous tones—"be good enough to follow me. The hour has come when you must be prepared for the last ceremony of your novitiate."

"I am ready," returned Billy. He followed the priest into a huge pavilion which had been erected during the night, Puna and Rere bringing up the rear.

As the curtain fell behind them, Billy saw that the place was lighted by a number of red candles in sconces, placed here and there about the walls, which were hung with tapestries in gorgeous purple and crimson hues.

There were a number of men in the pavilion,

and upon Billy's entrance, a chant was raised, a solemn dirge in a minor key. Then the High Priest intoned a prayer. Inasmuch as the chanting and praying were in a language that Billy did not understand, he decided that they were employing the ancient Chibcha tongue.

At the conclusion of this short ritual, several men stepped forward, and began, with all deference, to undress Bill. Then when the unrobing was finished, they rubbed his entire body with a thick gold-colored salve. Billy watched the application of this salve with interest. He knew that the ceremony called for the gilding of his entire body, and he was surprised that as the gilt hardened, it did not cause him any discomfort.

But the next stage of the proceeding was not quite so pleasant.

"Now be good enough to close your eyes, Highness." This suggestion came from Chua. "Once you are on the lake, the gilding will be removed from the eyelids—but until then custom prescribes that the entire body must shine like gold."

Billy obediently did as he was asked, and the men proceeded to coat his face and head with the golden salve. A few minutes later he found it impossible to open his eyes, and wondered how

on earth they ever would get the stuff off. A loincloth was fastened about him, shoes of soft leather were slipped on his feet and a thick feather cloak thrown over his shoulders.

Then Chua took his right hand and Puna his left and led him from the pavilion.

Just outside the entrance they came to a halt and he heard the younger Chibcha lord's voice in his ear.

"The Zipa is about to ascend his throne," whispered Puna. "He will mount the four steps directly before him—turn around and sit down. When the word is given he will throw back his cloak."

Billy put a foot forward, felt for the step and found it. Without hesitation, he mounted and sank back on the soft cushions of a large armchair.

As soon as he was seated, his throne was lifted —onto the shoulders of bearers, he judged—for they now moved down the steep mountain side at a swinging trot. Gripping the arms of his rather insecure seat to steady himself, his hands came in contact with metal. Could this be a golden throne? If so, no wonder the bearers grunted and breathed in great whistling gasps. Theirs was indeed a heavy burden.

A picture came into his mind, of old Chua, long, white beard sweeping back over a shoulder, and his ceremonial robes flying—marathoning behind on the crimson verge of apoplexy! In spite of the hardened substance on his face, Billy managed a smile. He would have given a good deal to have been able to see it. Later, he was to learn that the High Priest's discomfort was but a mirage of his own brain. In reality, both Chibcha lords were being borne behind him on smaller, but otherwise similar thrones.

Presently there was a fanfare of trumpets in the van, and his bearers stopped short.

"The Lord Zipa will kindly doff his cloak and throw it down to his slave—" said a voice from below.

Again Billy did as he was told, without question. All about him, he could hear the tramp of many men, and realized his party must have joined a much larger procession. Drums beat a long roll, a band broke into the strains of a slow march, and his bearers started on again, this time at a walk.

Now as they went forward, much whispering and shuffling of sandaled feet came to him on either hand. An occasional exclamation, or an

angry word in Spanish confirmed the impression that his way was lined with a curious populace.

Suddenly, he felt strangely shy and conspicuous. He sensed the staring gaze of hidden multitudes, and wished that he had been allowed to retain his feathered cloak. Strangely enough, he did not feel cold. On the mountainside, the air had been chill, but now that the reverberation of the music told him that they had entered the Red City, he became uncomfortably hot. He got a mental picture of the burning sun glare shut in between high walls of a narrow street, crowded with sweating humanity. So oppressively hot did he become that it seemed as if the whole heat of the universe must be concentrated in this hidden city of the mountains. In vain he turned his thoughts back to the Mangeroma jungle, with its vast tangles of blended greens and blacks, dim bronze shadows upon some rippling stream under the shade of overhanging branches. . . . It was no use. The fierce sun, beating down on his unprotected head, sent a wave of nausea sweeping over him; he could feel the heat waves rebound from the scorching roadway. The very air he breathed parched his throat and burned his lungs. Coupled with this torment, his blindness stimu-

lated an over-wrought imagination to an inferno.

Just as Billy reached the point where another minute would have driven him raving mad, his bearers stopped, the throne was lowered to the ground and he felt a slight vibration as someone mounted the steps.

"I am about to crown your Highness with the Golden Fringe of Majesty," Chua's voice was low, but vibrant with solemnity.

Billy felt something being placed on his brow; there came two cool, wet dabs on his burning eyelids, and the High Priest spoke again, in a louder tone.

"Anointed Zipa, Wearer of the Golden Fringe and Overlord with Thy Glorious Uncle of the Chibcha People—arise!"

Then he whispered to Billy—"Open your eyes and take my hand, Great Prince. We go now upon the lake."

The glare was blinding. Billy staggered and would have fallen had not Chua grasped his arm. Together they descended the steps of the throne and Puna joined them. The young Chibcha bowed low, then grasped Billy's other arm and the three started to walk slowly down a wide stone staircase, lined with soldiers.

Billy was gradually becoming used to the light. He saw that although these men were gorgeously uniformed in knee-length tunics of scarlet and gold, their heads surmounted with helmets of burnished metal, one and all presented arms with modern rifles.

The stairway led to the brink of the lake, where a raft of polished wood lay moored. The water's level was about ten feet below a broad quay of red sandstone. The quay was crowded with men, women and children, gay in brightly colored costumes. Clouds of aromatic smoke swirled above the people, filling the warm air with a pungent odor of herbs and spices.

Behind the circular quay, perpendicular cliffs formed a rose-red backdrop, six or seven hundred feet in height, to this superb setting. Narrow gorges in the cliffs ran back from the broad quay like spokes from a wheel hub, and Billy knew they must be the streets of the city.

High above the cliffs, mighty mountains reared their snow-capped peaks heaped in towering stalagmite toward the sunwashed blue of the sky.

Billy stepped aboard the raft. The moorings were cast off, and propelled by long sweeps in the

hands of Chua and Puna, the craft glided away toward the middle of the lake.

"Viva El Dorado! (Hail The Gilded One!)—Hail! The Sun's Anointed!" shouted the multitudes.

The silver note of a single trumpet cut the wave of re-echoing sound and stilled it. For an instant there was silence. Then from across the water, vibrant notes of an organ rolled, massed choirs took up the haunting refrain, soon to be joined by the crowds at the lakeside. Thousands of voices, rising and falling in cadence, chanted a Hymn to the Sun.

Billy turned in the direction of the music and he saw that the choristers, men and women, robed in white, were gathered about a throne of gold, on which was seated an old man, with a short, white beard. This personage, clad in crimson vestments, his brow encircled by a Golden Fringe, similar to Billy's own, he knew must be the Zipa Tani—his supposed Uncle.

But what interested the North American lad even more was the great temple before whose wide entrance the ruler's throne had been placed. Never in his wildest flights of fancy had Billy conceived of a cathedral, not as built up, stone by

stone, but as a hill of red sandstone, chiseled from living rock into a grand and imposing masterpiece of architecture. Later he was to learn that its beautiful façade was one hundred and forty-seven feet wide, by one hundred and thirty-eight feet high. Flanking it were two slightly smaller structures, also hewn from the cliff, their ornamented façades likewise chiseled into wizardries of art.

Then turning his head, he saw that the entire circumference of the red cliffs encircling the lake was lined with these splendid rock-hewn buildings. These, he guessed, must be the temples, government offices and palaces of the Zipas and their nobles. And the houses of the populace were cut into the walls of the streets which led from this central plaza.

No wonder this marvelous city had remained hidden for centuries from the rest of the world! Cut off from all civilization by towering mountain ranges, impassable to any but those who knew the trail by which he had traveled; and beyond the peaks to northeast, east and southeast, by those enormous jungles of the Amazon basin, trackless except to their man-eating denizens, who, as he knew from experience would ruthlessly kill all

strangers caught within their domain. . . . From the air, the courageous aviator who passed that way, flying high because of the peaks, would see a small mountain lake—hemmed in by sandstone cliffs—and that was all.

Billy no longer marveled that the Red City had never been found. But he was given no more time to ponder over the unsurpassed grandeur of this mountain fastness, for the voice of the High Priest broke in upon his thoughts.

The raft had reached the point on the lake midway between shores and the Chibcha lords raised their sweeps from the water and placed them on the polished decking.

"Majesty—" intoned the High Priest, bowing before him. "In bygone days at this stage of the ceremony, it was customary for the young Zipa to cast jewels and precious stones into the Holy Lake. This is no longer done. Instead, the Zipa casts himself into the lake and swims to the steps in the quay before his Uncle's throne.

"The waters of the Holy Lake dissolve the gold salve from his body, leaving it pure and white and cleansing it of sin. Are you ready to meet your Glorious Uncle, Co-Ruler of the Chibcha nation?"

"I am ready, Lord Chua."

"Then go to him, Majesty, and the blessing of the Sun go with Thee."

The Lord Chua stood aside and Billy strode to the front of the raft and onto a low springboard which extended a few feet above the water.

Billy knew that this would be the crowning test of his strange impersonation. Would the Old Man in the Chair recognize him as his nephew—or would he proclaim him an impostor? Death by slow torture would certainly be the result in the latter case. For what he had done and what he was doing was, to the Chibchas, not only *lèse-majesté,* but unpardonable sacrilege.

His mind ran swiftly over his slight chances of defense—he must snatch a gun or a sword from one of the guards, if possible—force them to kill him fighting, on the steps of the throne, if need be. Torture was unthinkable—Well, he wouldn't think about it, then!

With a wave of his hand to the hushed multitude, he leapt to the very end of the board, sprang high in the air, and his body clove the water in an almost splashless dive.

CHAPTER XV

ZIPA

BILLY came to the surface from his dive and saw that immersion in the lake had cleansed his body of the gilt salve as if by magic. As he had stood on the raft before his plunge he had steeled himself for the shock of ice-cold mountain water. But strangely enough, the lake was warm, uncomfortably hot in spots. Using a powerful crawl stroke, he swam swiftly, covering the distance between the raft and the quay in short order.

At the steps he was met by a delegation of gorgeously garbed functionaries, evidently high nobles or officials of the government. As he climbed ashore a cloak was thrown over his shoulders and he was led, dripping wet, to a door in the side of the quay to the right of the stairway.

Within the rock chamber Billy was astounded to find that the room was ablaze with electric light. Here, other men took him in charge. He was rubbed dry with soft towels and then given cotton underwear to put on.

"Will Majesty be good enough to seat himself?" The head valet pointed to a chair.

Billy sat down, a barber appeared, and after draping a sheet about him, the man proceeded to give him a much needed haircut. While this was going on, two women took charge of his hands, and with a nation awaiting his appearance, the newly ordained Zipa of the Chibchas was given his first manicure!

Inasmuch as Billy's beard was something to be anticipated, rather than seen, the shave was omitted, and his dressing went on. A knee-length tunic, sleeveless and cut low in the neck, was pulled over his head. It was a thin, cool garment of fine linen, dyed crimson and beautifully embroidered with threads of gold. A wide gold belt was clasped about his waist, and a short sword fastened to it, the scabbard and hilt also of gold set with emeralds and rubies. Soft leather sandals with gilt lacings, and the gold fringe about his brow completed the costume.

He adjusted the sword so that it swung comfortably at his side, saw that its blade pulled easily from the scabbard and passed through the doorway into the sunlight on the quay.

"All set—" he thought— "thank the Lord a sword is part of the royal dress. Here's hoping I won't have to use it now!"

From conversation with Puna during the past week, Billy knew exactly what he must do next. So, with a hand on his sword hilt, he slowly mounted the stairs toward the old man who awaited his nephew, seated on the throne of gold on the cathedral terrace.

Amid the cheers of an excited populace, between lines of bowing nobles, he strode up the broad stair, looking neither to the right nor the left. With a forced smile of confidence on his lips, he approached the potentate, bowed three times as the ritual prescribed and knelt at his feet.

Then raising his head, he looked fearlessly into the King's countenance. A short, white imperial and mustache lent an added dignity to the rugged, kindly face. A finely shaped nose, jutting from below a broad, high brow, bespoke intelligence and decision. But the eyes, set wide apart, did not meet Billy's gaze.

Instead, they stared straight over his head at the rose-red cliff buildings across the lake.

Then the old man spoke according to the ritual.

"Who kneels before me wearing the Gold Fringe of Majesty?"

"Thy servant, Mighty Zipa, and the servant of the Chibcha People." Bill had learned these

questions and answers on the way to the Red City, and knew that he was letter perfect.

"Before a man may rule, what must he do?" The King continued to stare straight before him.

"He must learn to serve, Great King."

"Hast Thou fulfilled the service of Thy novitiate?"

"I have, Majesty."

"Who sponsors this youth?" asked the King Tani.

Puna and the High Priest stepped forward and knelt on either side of Billy.

"We are the sponsors," they answered in unison.

"Do you testify that this young man has fulfilled the requirements of our ancient laws?"

"He has, Glorious Majesty."

"Do you find him worthy of his kingly trust?"

"We find him worthy, Ruler-under-the-Sun."

"It is well," said the Zipa. "You may retire."

As Chua and Puna moved back to their places among the nobles, the King got slowly to his feet.

"Come to me, Hualpa, my nephew," he said to Billy in a low voice and held out his hands.

Billy rose and stepped closer, realizing that until this moment he had not heard his Chibcha

name. He was caught in an embrace and for the moment the King's hands played lightly over his face.

"It is indeed my little nephew grown to manhood," murmured the Zipa. "Your voice has changed, Hualpa—but that is natural. You are a man now. Praise be to our Lord the Sun that you have returned to me strong and in good health. The Golden Fringe you wear will prove a doubly heavy burden—for from now on, you must be not only Ruler of our people with me—but be my eyes as well."

Then for the first time, the cruelty of his impersonation smote Billy's heart. This kindly old man who took him for his dead nephew—was blind.

"Speak to me, Hualpa," begged the old man. "Tell your Uncle you are glad to see him."

"Of course I am glad to be with you, Sire." Billy's voice trembled with feeling. "But I am more than sorry to learn of your—trouble."

"I know you are, my boy. I can hear it in your voice—and it makes an old man very happy.—But we must not forget our duty in the joy of our meeting."

He motioned Billy to stand beside him and

placing an affectionate hand on his shoulder, began to speak to the crowds below.

"People of the Glorious Chibcha Nation!" he cried. "Rejoice with me that my nephew, the Zipa Hualpa, has returned to us safe and sound after these long years of his trial!"

"Viva Hualpa! Viva Hualpa! Viva Hualpa!" thundered the people. "Long life to Our Zipas—Tani and Hualpa!"

"Thank you my friends—my children," said the King. "Let us give thanks to our Lord the Sun for his Manifold Blessings."

Again there rose the strains of the anthem Billy had heard from the lake, and again the stupendous effect of thousands of voices singing in unison thrilled him.

When the last strains had died away, the Chibchas, one and all, noble and commoner, dropped to their knees while the blind King blessed them.

Then a gorgeous personage bearing a tall golden staff, marched into the open space before the throne.

"Way for Their Majesties!" he cried, facing the people. "Way for our Glorious Zipas!"

"Come, nephew, it is time we were gone to the palace." With the King's hand on Bill's shoulder,

they stepped down from their lofty place and followed the usher while the people remained kneeling.

The man preceded them toward the building to the right of the cathedral. As they approached the entrance, double doors of glass and wrought iron swung open and they passed into a large reception hall, whose walls of polished red stone reflected the rose-colored electrics which illuminated the place.

Up a wide curving stair of the same polished stone they went, and down a long corridor to the throne room of the palace. Here their guide led them to a double throne at the far end of the great chamber, which rested on a dais, beneath a scarlet canopy.

No more had they taken their places side by side on the throne when the room began to fill with people, and for the next two hours, Billy received the homage of his nobles.

He was faint with hunger and fatigue by the time this ceremony was over. Neither food nor drink had passed his lips since the night before. This business of being a Zipa seemed all work and no play. Billy would have gladly traded his kingship for a square meal then and there.

When the King suggested that it was time they should go to their separate apartments for lunch and rest before resuming the day's duties, he had difficulty in hiding his enthusiasm.

A few minutes later an usher led him up another flight of stairs and along a broad passage to a door which he opened and stepped aside for Billy to enter. He found himself in a small room, furnished with deep easy chairs and low couches, inviting rest. A thick rug covered the stone floor. The walls were hung with native tapestries, depicting hunting scenes, and through the open windows there was a view of the lake and its encompassing plaza. Near the window stood a table, laid with a white cloth. From covered dishes rose the appetizing odor of hot food.

"Lunch at last!" exclaimed Billy; then turned as he heard the door close behind him.

"My Lord's meal awaits him—" volunteered Rere with a bow. "Is it his will that his servant serve him?"

"Say, Rere, this servant stuff is the bunk!" Bill retorted, roughly translating the colloquial American of his thoughts into Mangeroma idiom that brought a smile to the Young Chief's face. "You know as well as I do that all this master-and-

man business is part of the pretense on which our lives depend. When we are alone like this—for heaven's sake, let's be natural!"

"Then Bill is still my white brother?" Rere's eyes gleamed.

"You bet he is, Rere. Come along and eat—you must be quite as starved as I am."

Half an hour later, their appetites appeased, the two left the table and dropped into comfortable chairs.

"Of course, I had no choice about this Zipa business—" began Billy. "I even thought it might prove a means toward finding my father and the explorer Stanton. Who knows? The airplane moored on the lake is the one in which we crossed the Andes. Dad *must* have flown it here. Yet there hasn't been a word said to me about him. Have you heard anything?"

Rere shook his head. "Nothing. But then I understand little of this tongue these people speak. One thing I do know—though it tears my heart to say it, Bill."

"What is it?"

"It is that—strangers are not tolerated in the Red City."

"You mean—they're put to death?"

The young Chief nodded slowly.

"Then Dad—" Bill's voice shook, his hands clenched the arms of his chair. "He was looking for me, without a doubt. That lake is the only possible landing place for miles. Those devils—they must have killed him—and here I am—playing King to his murderers! I'd like to shoot every last man of them!" Two large tears welled up in his eyes. He brushed them impatiently away with the back of his hand.

"But there isn't a thing we can do. We're in this up to our necks—both of us. Chances are I'll make a slip before long—and from what I know of the Chibchas, our finish will follow pronto."

Rere rose to his feet and came close to Bill's chair. "But perhaps they have made an exception in your father's case," he said. He could not bear to see his friend suffer, and it was more to alleviate Billy's grief than from any real belief he had in his own words. "They may be holding him prisoner—"

"But why should they? No—these people take no chances. This city must be kept secret from the rest of the world. It's their fetich—their unwritten law. Strangers are taboo."

"Yes, I suppose what you say is true," agreed

Rere. "And the sooner we are able to make our escape, the better for us. Have you any plans?"

"I hadn't thought of it before this, Rere," replied Billy wearily. "Perhaps we can find a way—we've got to, that's all."

There came a knock on the door and Rere moved across the room to open it.

"We'll talk again as soon as we're alone," whispered Billy. "Tonight, perhaps. Remember, not a word while anyone is near. Some of these Chibchas may understand Mangeroma for all we know."

Rere nodded, and swinging wide the door admitted the usher and his gold staff.

"Will your Majesty be good enough to follow his servant?" he said with an obsequious bow. "The Royal Presence is awaited in the Council Chamber."

"Lead away!" said Billy and walked out of the room behind his pompous guide.

Traversing the corridor and descending a flight, they came to a low door near the head of the grand staircase. This the man opened and Bill found himself on a raised platform. The dais boasted two arm chairs. In one the Blind Zipa was seated. Down the length of the narrow room ran

a long table about which sat a number of nobles. These gentry rose and bowed as Billy sat down in the vacant chair after a word of greeting to the King.

As the council seated themselves again, a door at the lower end of the room swung wide. A creature, dirty, ragged and forlorn, was pushed forward by armed guards. Heavy chains manacled the prisoner's wrists and ankles and clanked dully as he shuffled slowly into a penned-off dock to one side of the dais.

Billy sat up in his chair, his whole body tense with excitement. In the guarded prisoner, facing him, he had immediately recognized his father—whom he had believed dead—Henry Smith.

CHAPTER XVI

DISCOVERY

BILLY controlled himself by a tremendous effort. He kept silent as the head of the council rose in his place at the table. He waited while the Chibcha noble bowed before the throne and commenced to speak—waited with the fear that his father, by word or movement would betray recognition. But the prisoner did not once raise his eyes from the floor.

"Mighty Zipas and nobles of the Royal Council"—began the chairman, in fluent Spanish. "The prisoner in the dock who claims to be a North American explorer, by name Henry Smith, landed his airplane on the Holy Lake two weeks ago. This evil machine still profanes our sacred territory. That his case was not brought before this council earlier, is due to Zipa Tani's wish that his nephew, the Zipa Hualpa, should be present at the hearing. What is your Majesties' pleasure regarding this interloper?"

"Before we render our judgment," said the blind King, "it is in order that we hear comments

from the council. If you gentlemen have formed opinions with regard to this unusual case, now is the time to state them."

Billy noticed that both the High Priest and Puna were seated at the board. At a nod from the chairman, Chua rose.

"Majesties," he said without preamble, "the law against strangers entering the Red City is known to us all. It proscribes death for the transgressor. In all previous cases this has been the sentence fulfilled. But this man has committed an added offense. He landed his accursed airplane upon the Holy Lake. To touch its sacred water, except by special dispensation accorded from the temple is sacrilege for stranger and Chibcha alike. Death in the fiery pit beneath our city is the penalty! So says the law—its dictum is final."

The High Priest sat down, a satisfied smirk on his face, amid the murmurs of approval from the council.

Puna immediately got to his feet.

"Majesties: I beg to say that Lord Chua errs in his last statement. If there is no recourse from the dictates of our law, why is the other North American, Stanton, still alive? If I remember rightly he wandered into our city, having chanced

on the secret pass over the mountains, more than a year ago. Today he has a house and servants of his own. He is honored by us all as a man of great learning."

"Doctor Stanton is a man upon whose head Our Lord the Sun has laid His Fingers—" interrupted the King. "No man can be sane, Lord Puna, who spends his entire time studying the habits of birds. Yet Doctor Stanton does just that. His knowledge of birds is vast, and our national university is reaping the benefit of his observations. Therefore, his life has been spared. But you think then that Doctor Stanton should suffer execution—as well as this man, Henry Smith?"

Puna squared his shoulders and spoke bravely— "No, my Lord King, I do not think so. We pride ourselves on being a civilized and enlightened people. This law is barbarous. It should be repealed. Neither of these men is worthy of death."

"I suppose," snarled Chua— "that the Lord Puna would turn these men loose to go back to their own countries?"

"I would," said Puna firmly.

"And let them publish the secret of the Red City to all the world?"

"Certainly. We are living in the nineteenth century of the Christian era—not the sixteenth—nor yet the Dark Ages. Strong nations are no longer permitted to swallow up small ones. Today in the world there is such a thing as a balance of power. My Lord the High Priest is three hundred years behind the times!"

"Bah!" Chua had lost his temper. "Your words are treason! You yourself should be thrown into the pit!"

"One moment, my Lords!"

Billy rose to his feet and strode to the edge of the platform. As he did so he saw the prisoner start sharply and stare up at him. "There is an old Spanish proverb—" he was smiling now—"which says that 'a man must eat a peck of salt with a friend before he knows him'; and another—'little said is soonest mended.'" For a bare instant he allowed his eyes to meet those of the elder Smith—and saw his father give an almost imperceptible nod of understanding.

"It would be well, Lord Chua," he continued, "if you dined oftener with Lord Puna before accusing him of treason. The stand he is taking in this matter proves conclusively to me that he is not only your friend—but a friend of the entire

Chibcha nation. Times have changed since our ancestors built this city as a refuge from oppression. The world beyond the hidden pass has advanced—become more civilized since then. The law relating to strangers may have served an excellent purpose at one time, but it is cruel and unjust today. It is also as foolish as it is dangerous to the very existence of the Chibcha people."

"You preach a radical doctrine, Hualpa," remarked the Zipa Tani. "And one that sounds strange in our ears. Explain yourself more fully."

"I am simply advising the use of common sense in our policies, Sire," Billy spoke with telling simplicity. "From books you sent me during the past six years I have learned that nations no longer become powerful through conquest. Today, it is trade that makes for superiority. We Chibchas are not advancing because we are not self-supporting. The output of our gold and copper mines is hoarded in our national treasury or used secretly to buy foreign goods. Of ourselves, we manufacture nothing except those things our ancestors made by hand a thousand years ago. We have no machinery, no experts, no trade. As a nation we are standing still. And all because of this stupid secrecy!

"Then again—aviation has become a great factor in transportation during the past ten years. I have seen airplanes pass over my cave. The North American states will surely persist in the search for Doctor Stanton—he is too valuable to them, I imagine, to give up easily. One airplane has located this city—others are certain to do so before long. If they find that we kill all strangers, an army will come—and then, goodbye to the Red City—and our Chibcha nation as an entity. Murder this man in the dock—and you will make a fatal and terrible mistake!"

He sat down and the prisoner, who had been listening attentively suddenly commenced to speak. But the words that rang clearly through the room were in a tongue that held no meaning for Billy.

"One moment, prisoner!"

The King Tani raised a hand for silence while the members of the council stared in open-eyed wonder at this ragged stranger. "How is it that you speak our ancient language?" he inquired in Spanish.

"This is black magic!" cried the High Priest, getting to his feet. "Away with him!"

"Silence, Chua!" thundered the blind Zipa.

"Speak, Henry Smith. We would know who you are—and the answer to this mystery!"

"What puzzles me," Mr. Smith replied with a smile, "is why you people have discarded your expressive and beautiful Chibcha for Spanish—but that can wait. By profession, Zipa, I am an anthropologist. It is my business, among other things, to learn historic and prehistoric languages. You may or may not be aware that thousands of years ago, the Chibcha nation inhabited Mexico. There is evidence to prove this. And also that you were driven out of Central America by hordes of Aztecs from the north. Eventually you settled in what is now the republic of Colombia, from whence you disappeared shortly after the Spanish conquest."

"You speak the truth, Henry Smith," said the King Tani. "But why did you come here?"

"I headed an expedition seeking Doctor Stanton, your Majesty. And this afternoon I have learned from the conversation that you hold him a prisoner in this city. If you continue to keep him captive his disappearance, and mine, will surely be investigated. The United States of America does not permit a foreign nation to dispose of her citizens. Your young Zipa, Hualpa, who speaks as

I would be proud to have a son of mine speak, told the truth when he declared that your present policy regarding the outside world was stupid and would prove fatal to your existence. Think well, King, before you antagonize so great a power as the United States!"

For several minutes there was silence in the room. Billy realized that his father's words had made a profound impression upon the aged king and his council. Presently he rose again to his feet.

"Your Majesty—" he said, "my lords and gentlemen: the prisoner's words must be taken into consideration. Let us meet in this room a week from today for a final decision. And in the interim let us give our careful deliberation to the possibility of a change in our policy. Meanwhile, I propose to learn to fly—and this man shall teach me. What says your Majesty?" he finished, turning an eager smile on the King.

The King answered him benevolently. "I say that your suggestions are wise, Hualpa. We shall postpone our decision for a week. I can understand your wishing to receive flying instruction, but before you do so, we must have Mr. Smith's

word of honor that he will not take advantage of it as a means of escape."

"And I give it gladly—" the explorer told him. "It is no part of my plan to leave this city without accomplishing my mission. When I do leave, Doctor Stanton goes with me!"

"That is as may be," replied the King. "This meeting is hereby adjourned. Lord Puna, see to it that Mr. Smith is suitably clothed and housed. He is to be treated with all respect—until this council finds its final decision."

"I should like to inspect the plane, sire," requested Billy. "Will you go with me? Senor Smith can meet us on the quay, in perhaps an hour?—and explain the mechanism to us."

"I'll be glad to go with you, Hualpa." King Tani rose. "I will meet you there in an hour." He laid his hand on the usher's shoulder and walked from the room.

"My Lord Puna," Billy called. "As soon as Senor Smith has changed and has had a substantial meal, have him escorted to my apartment."

"It shall be done as you wish, Majesty." Puna bowed and freeing the explorer from his irons, led him to the door.

Billy went straight back to his sitting room

where he found the Mangeroma chief awaiting him.

"Rere!" he exclaimed in excitement— "my father is alive! He's a prisoner here!" And for the next half hour he gave his friend a recital of the doings in the council room that afternoon.

"When your honorable father and you fly away take me with you, white brother," pleaded Rere. "In this city of red cliffs, I long for the forest and my own people."

"But Dad will never consent to leave until the Chibchas have given their permission," protested Bill. "He has given his word. Believe me, I know him. Nothing—not even the fear of death—will force him to break it."

"What are we going to do, then?"

"Search me, old man. I'm up a tree just now, if I ever was.—Dad may be able to suggest a way out. Somebody is at the door now. Open it like a good fellow, will you? It's probably Dad."

The door swung wide and Puna ushered Mr. Smith into the room. The explorer's hair and beard had been trimmed, and in his Chibcha tunic and sandals he presented quite a different picture from the ragged prisoner of the council room.

He bowed to Billy. "Thanks to you and this

young gentleman, Lord Hualpa," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "I am clean and comfortable once more."

"You have dined?" Billy kept his face straight by an effort.

"I have, your Majesty."

"Good. Lord Puna, will you be good enough to go and see if all arrangements have been made for our inspection of the airplane? This gentleman and I will follow shortly."

Puna bowed and withdrew from the room.

"Dad!" cried Bill, rushing to his father, to be clasped in his arms. "Gee, Dad—I'm so awfully glad to have you with me again! When I saw Old Trail Eater on the lake this morning, I was sure you'd been murdered by these people."

"And I had given *you* up for lost weeks ago, Bill." Mr. Smith's voice was not quite steady, and there was a suspicious moisture in his eyes. "Thank God you're safe, son. But—how on earth did you get here—and become a Zipa of the Chibchas?"

In as few words as possible, Billy sketched his adventures from the time he had landed Old Trail Eater on Lake Innocence on his flight from Colonel da Silva's plantation.

"And this is Rere, Dad," he ended, turning to the young Mangeroma who stood quietly in the background. "The Chief who saved my life and treated me as a brother."

"But he saved me from the big snake, first." Rere, though he shook Mr. Smith's hand warmly enough, was nevertheless embarrassed.

"I am happy to meet you, Rere," smiled the explorer. "And you have placed a debt upon me I never can repay.—But look here, you two, we'd better be getting down to the lake. Some of these people may smell a rat if we linger too long. Lord Chua, for instance. The High Priest is as dangerous as he is bigoted, Bill. He'll bear watching, that's certain."

"I know it. I think he's just biding his time to do us a dirty trick," declared Billy. "And the sooner we three and Doctor Stanton can shake the dust of this city from our feet the better. What's your plan, Dad?"

"Haven't had time to think of one, son. Let's take the business in hand first. We are due at the lake."

"May I come with you?" Rere's tone and expression were eager.

"Of course you can, old sport!" Bill clapped him on the shoulder. "Let's go."

On the quay, they were met by the Zipa Tani, who was surrounded by nobles of his suite, the High Priest and Puna among them. He greeted Billy affectionately, and Mr. Smith with studied courtesy. But the old man seemed worried. Billy wondered if the High Priest was the cause of his abstraction. A barge lay at the foot of the steps; the party boarded it and were rowed out to the plane.

As they went over the mechanism, Mr. Smith explained carefully to Billy the working details, while the rest of the party looked on in wonder and Bill was hard put to keep from exploding with mirth. In conclusion, Mr. Smith suggested a short flight.

"I have had a strenuous day," objected Tani. "Tonight we hold a state banquet to the Zipa Hualpa. Soon we must go and make ready for it. But if you care to 'taxi', I think you called it, around the lake with a few of us, I would be glad to go with you, senor."

As the cabin would not hold them all, Billy, the King Tani, Puna, and Rere, at Bill's request,

remained aboard with Mr. Smith, and the others retired to the barge.

With the first roar of the motor, people poured out of the side streets of the city into the plaza, and during the half hour that Mr. Smith taxied the plane around the lake, the crowd on the quay continued to increase. As his father shut off the motor and glided down toward the barge, Billy noticed that Chua was talking with a noble who had come out in another craft with a band of soldiers.

Old Trail Eater nosed the barge and the High Priest sprang aboard. Just behind him were the guard.

"Seize that man!" he cried, pointing to Billy. "He is an impostor—the murderer of our true Zipa Hualpa!"

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE WING

For an instant Billy stood dumfounded at this unexpected turn of affairs. Chua was not bluffing. He was in deadly earnest.

As Puna rushed him at the High Priest's command Billy sidestepped, and sent him crashing to the floor with a short-arm jab to the point of his chin. Mr. Smith leaped for old Chua and they both went hurtling overside, carrying several soldiers with them.

Rere was not slow in coming to his friends' assistance. Snatching a rifle from the rack and using it as a club, he kept the narrow bulwark cleared. As each man tried to climb aboard from the barge, Rere neatly disposed of him. In the jostling crowd, the several shots that were fired went wild, and the fray became a hand-to-hand affair.

Meanwhile, Billy dove into the cockpit and got the motor started. Still warm from taxiing, it picked up quickly. Soon Old Trail Eater was moving ahead. A glance over his shoulder gave him

a picture of the blind King Tani still in his seat and Puna, crumpled on the floor of the cabin. Twisting round, Billy opened the window on his right and leaned out of the cockpit.

They had left the barge behind now and there was no more firing. The Chibchas were undoubtedly afraid of hitting the aged Zipa. Mr. Smith and the High Priest were being taken aboard the barge. On the decking of the plane, just below, stood Rere, hurling epithets in fluent Mangeroma and bad Spanish.

"Get inside the cabin, Rere," called Billy. "Close the door and bolt it. Then come forward to me."

He pulled up the window and adjusted his headphone. He looked up as Rere entered the cockpit.

Then he unhooked the connecting phoneset from the back of his seat and adjusted it upon Rere's head.

"You'll have to wear this, or you won't be able to understand a word—the motor deafens you."

Rere smiled happily. "That is wonderful, Bill. I can hear you perfectly. What shall I do now?"

"I want you to go into the cabin. In the first locker to the right you will find a tin box. Bring

it to me. After that, go back there. You can leave your phoneset here. When the door to this cockpit is shut, the cabin is practically soundproof. See what you can do to make Puna comfortable. Poor fellow, I hated to do it, but I had to stun him! But he ought to be coming round soon. Then tell the King who I am and how we got in this Zipa business. Let them know I mean no harm—quite the contrary, in fact. If I want you, I'll press this button in the dash which rings a bell in the cabin."

"But if Puna shows fight, Bill? Shall I kill him?"

"Certainly not! Cover him with a gun. He'll be quiet enough. Hurry, now! I want to leave this lake and go into the air just as soon as you bring me the tin box."

Billy had just got the big amphibian onto the step when Rere reappeared. He placed the box on Billy's knees, and stripping the phoneset off, darted into the cabin, closing the door behind him.

As he talked with Rere, Billy had taxied to the end of the lake where he had made a wide turn. Now having straightened out, they went skimming along the surface of the water, gaining speed with every split second.

Once in the air, he leveled off at about five hundred feet above the red cliffs. Banking slightly, he started in a wide circle above the city. Then he opened the box with a key attached to its lid. From it he took some papers, which he sat on, for safe keeping. A writing pad and pencil came next into evidence and using the box on his knees as a desk, he commenced writing a letter.

"The Royal Chibcha Council,
The Red City.
Gentlemen:

King Tani and Lord Puna are going to see something of the world with me. We shall return to the Red City in about a month. If you value their lives, see that no harm comes to my father, Henry Smith, or to Doctor Stanton.

When I come back I shall encircle the city until I see those two gentlemen, safe and well, standing on the steps of the temple. If they are not there, I shall not land—although you will hear from me—and some others—later."

With a smile he signed the missive, "Sincerely yours, William Smith—alias, the Zipa Hualpa."

Having completed his task, he placed the letter in the tin box which he locked, leaving the key

hanging to the lid. Then he turned his attention overside.

Below him sparkled the Holy Lake, a brilliant blue jewel in a rose-red setting. The barge, a mere dot now, lay moored at the foot of the cathedral steps, but he could see that the quay and the plaza were still crowded with people. Over went Old Trail Eater's nose and Billy sent his big bus hurtling down in a wide spiral arc.

Leveling off at about fifty feet above the water, he made a partial circle of the quay while the crowd scattered below the roaring plane. Then he thrust the box containing his letter overside and dropped it at the temple doors. The plane zoomed upward and away into the northeast.

In the heart of virgin forest, spread out on the west bank of the island-studded Amazon, lies the great inland capital of Peru—Iquitos. Although this city is two thousand, one hundred and forty-seven English miles from the open sea, it still remains the second largest port in the Republic. Even at this remote point, the Amazon is three miles wide, and much more like an inland sea than a river. Ocean-going steamers, sailing direct from Liverpool and other world ports, line the

docks. A fine array of white buildings face the water, handsomely constructed of brick, marble and tile. Back of these are the business streets and residential quarters.

It was nearing ten o'clock in the evening, when an amphibian airplane, sending Very lights before it, nosed gingerly down upon the Amazon at Iquitos and taxied over to the landing stage. After tying up to the floating pier, four men stepped ashore. Passing over the bridge that connected the pier with the steel jetty, they made their way into the town.

People turned and stared curiously at the tall, red-haired young fellow who carefully piloted an elderly man along the crowded sidewalks, and at the two young men following. The strange garments of these foreigners attracted the attention of Iquitos' citizens, for each of the four wore a brightly colored tunic of bizarre design, and was shod with sandals. It could be seen that the elderly man with the white beard was blind.

Presently the strangers entered the Malecon Palace, an ornate hotel, of poor design, yet constructed of the most expensive materials, and occupying a prominent position on the waterfront. The red-haired young man, who was evi-

dently the party's leader, crossed the marble-pillared lobby to the desk and addressed the night clerk.

"I want a five-room suite," he said in fluent Spanish. "A sitting room and four bedrooms with bath. We have no luggage, at present, as you see. But my airplane in which we have just arrived is moored at the docks, and should be sufficient guarantee. I also want you to telephone the best physician in the city to come at once to our rooms. The case is urgent."

"Very good, sir," the clerk pushed forward the register. This strange guest spoke with an air of authority. "Have the senors dined?"

"They have not," said Billy. "Send a waiter with a menu, if you please. In the morning, I shall want the name of a good tailor. We will now go directly to our rooms."

One afternoon, some forty days after the past events, watchers on the heights above the Red City espied a plane speeding toward them out of the northeast.

A shot of warning was fired from the plaza. Temple bells echoed and reechoed along the narrow streets. Chibchas poured forth from their

rock-hewn houses, and the plaza and quay along the Holy Lake soon became densely packed with people staring skyward.

Three times the airplane circled the city. Then shooting downward, it splashed the lake's calm waters and glided smoothly to the wide stair in the quay below the cathedral terrace.

Out of the airplane's cabin, four men appeared. They were dressed in silk pongee suits of fashionable cut. Three of them wore smart panamas, but the elderly gentleman with the closely cropped white beard, wore a narrow fringe of gold encircling his brow, and walked slightly in advance of the others. He paused for an instant at the top of the steps and smiled, as if to himself. Then he went on toward the open space before the temple's doors, where two men stood apart from the crowd.

"How do you do, Senor Smith!" He extended his hand in genial greeting. "And this other gentleman is Doctor Stanton, of course. Until today, I have never had the pleasure of *seeing* either of you!"

"G-reat guns! It's the Zipa Tani!" cried Mr Smith Then, more formally, as he shook hands.

"I took your Majesty for an American business man!"

"Thanks for the compliment—" smiled the King, after greeting Doctor Stanton. "I hope soon to become one. Clothes make a great difference, don't they?" He gazed proudly down at his habiliments. "I intend that the Chibchas shall change their ancient costume for the dress of civilization in the near future.—You gentlemen have suffered no—er—inconvenience since my departure, I hope?"

"Not since my son dropped a certain tin box on these steps," grinned the explorer. "But I am delighted to see your Majesty's eyesight is restored. May I offer my sincere congratulations?"

"Thank you, senor. That splendid young fellow, your son, is the wonder worker." He beamed, and drew Billy forward. "Excuse me for a moment—some of these people seem to have become impatient. Although the Chibcha nation will soon be a republic, I am still Zipa—what is it, Chua?" he said sternly. "Can't you see I am engaged?"

The High Priest swept forward like a black thundercloud from the group of nobles who had been gradually encroaching upon the royal presence. Inwardly fuming, it was only by great effort

that he was able to present the semblance of outward composure.

"Sire," he began, bowing low—"Glorious Zipa, Ruler under the Sun of the Chibcha nation and Overlord of the Red City—"

"Cut the titles and get down to business," said the King. "I know them by heart anyway, and since my conference with the President of Peru and the American Ambassador in Lima, I don't believe in them any more.—What is it you wish to say?"

"If you please, Majesty, men under my instructions exhumed the body of Prince Haulpa from the grave in which they expected to find my son, who had been his servant. These Smiths, father and son, are their murderers!"

"They are nothing of the kind!" thundered the Zipa. "I am in possession of all the facts. My nephew died a natural death. So did your son, in all probability. As for the Senors Smith, while they choose to honor the Chibcha nation by remaining with us, they are my guests!" He frowned fiercely upon Chua. "I believe I have explained sufficiently? It may interest you to know that thanks entirely to young Senor Smith, I am now able to see. He it was who engaged the famous

surgeon and had the cataracts removed from my eyes. And I will say that since regaining my sight, I have perceived many things, both in Iquitos and in Lima, which prove conclusively that this Red City and all the—er—hush-hush—?" he looked to Billy for approval of this new word, then went on firmly—"all this hush-hush stuff we have been hiding behind is a—" He hesitated again. "What did you call it, Bill?"

"A back number, King Tani—"

"That's right, my boy! A back number! This place, in spite of the noise which the people are making at present, is as dead as last week's news. And the sooner Chua and the rest hear about it, the better."

He glared at his subjects once more. Then turned to Bill.

"By the way, do your father and Doctor Stanton play contract? As soon as I've got this speech off my chest, I thought we would have dinner, and then play a few rubbers?"

"I'm game!" said Billy. "And Dad is a whiz at contract. How about you, Doctor?"

"Why, yes, I contracted to let the Museum know my whereabouts—" returned the ornithologist vaguely. He was jotting down notes on a

condor that sailed lazily over the lake, and did not welcome this interruption. "I told you, Smith, that that was the reason I sent off that gold chalice by one of these fellows."

"But why the cup?" inquired Billy. "A letter would have helped things considerably."

"My paper was too valuable. I needed it for notes," snapped the scientist and moved off in the direction of the condor.

"He's out!" declared Billy as the others smiled.

"Puna will have to play then," said the King. "Why are you such a rotten bridge player, Puna?"

"I thought I was pretty good," retorted that dapper young man, flicking an imaginary bit of dust from his highly polished oxfords with a silk handkerchief. "—Anyway, I'm better than Rere."

"You think you are, if that's any help," laughed the Chief, who was quite as immaculately dressed as his Chibcha friend. "But when it comes to flying, I can give you cards and spades, partner!"

"I gave them flight instructions while King Tani was in the hospital at Iquitos," Billy explained to his father. "They're going in business together—starting an air transport line from this town to the coast."

Mr. Smith stared at him in open amazement.

"That's great, boy. I'm proud of you—but how did you ever do it?"

"Sh!" whispered Billy, for the King had begun to speak to the crowd before the temple. "The Zipa's a bug on business, too. Listen to him giving his people what's what. This is going to be good!"

Those who liked Billy's adventures in New Guinea, Arabia and South America will enjoy reading the next book of this series, "Billy Smith —Trail Eater Ace: or, Into the Wilds of Northern Alaska by Airplane."

THE END